Marcel Ray Duriez

Nevaeh

Book: 57

Scry

'You question everything, you talk to yourself, you like to read, you constantly challenge yourself, you're a little scatterbrained, you might struggle with a habit, and you worry too much. You're legitimately brilliant, and a genuine genius.'
-Marcel Ray Duriez

Prolegomenon:

‘You cannot stick an orange scurrying flag in my butt and think you can take a claim of me. Yes, I know that my heart is a deep ocean full of shipwrecks. Yes, I understand that due to novelty shipping law, you can explore; me and all my moments of lost wrecks, and take claim of all, yet that means you want my heart. Yet you forget I do not have one anymore.’

~Nevaeh~

Part: 1

The flames everywhere, I look at the city now blackened and changed forever, from the world burning, it was pleasurable to have everything at decay, everything was burning with intensity and heat, it has

become the love and desire of the world, to let everything rot, and be eaten away, water nozzle everywhere trying to extinguish the flames that have taken skyscraper after skyscraper, men heavy armored in helmets nozzle in his fists yet it was no help, the blood pounded in my head of seeing my world coming to an end, like great demon dragons flames upon the world, everything that was understanding and memories, blazing and burning to bring down the tatters and charred ruins of history.

All were fighting off the flames of the sun that was burning up the Earth in global warming. All the hands were moving in rhythm like maestro playing all the symphonies of hell upon the world of blazing

and burning to bring down to nothing put ruins of history- lost and caring gone. With the figurative symbolic helmet of war and war to come- and children at the cost of loss, now to the point of hunger- and famine... I- then stored ahead adrift.

My mind lost to the thought of what came next when I have comprehended I have a home left and we'll be living on the street high and low that link together the many buildings that are in shambles, glass was everywhere and thick smoke; her eyes all orange like her face with intense flame- eyes watery with the flames and children on fire, flickered was the numbers of books in satanic ash and much paper and building materials, the igniter was the sun, the

igniter was the people themselves- letting the sun in, now ever too close to the plant it has its revenge.

The skyscrapers lapped up in a gorging, already run-down now broken down in the heat of distortion, now past decrepit, in ruins deteriorated, falling apart in mid-air, in disrepair, ramshackle- into the worse for wear, flames that burned the evening in the night’s sky glowing red and yellow and black, and backlight in colors of instance lights, by electricity and whipping power lines, the man-made thunder crashes in the air- of unleashed power- most of the city has a blackout, however not this part yet.

People and kids swarm fireflies, around above, below, and in the air falling out of thousand-foot buildings. Like hell to the rain… like the sick and twisted joke, she wanted above all, wanted to shove a hot dog on a stick, while the flapping books and pages-scream in the air like dying on the pathways- lit by flickering glowing burning and glowing streetlights. There are no lawns, just glass, still, and concrete on concrete. Whirls of flames, ash, and paper, the books and networking and grid went up in sparks and whirls; turned dark with burning, as it has been for weeks now, there is no stop.

All looking just like piss blew away in the cold wind- ash for trees, mocking to

them the cuteness of everything they are attempting to control.

-And-

Likewise, a whisper of a crazed ghost, inspector, phantom, a wraith, in spirit having a soul, that is shadowed, presence, with a vision to give and apparition to behold, yet like nothing more hallucination, a dream of the broach, a doppelgänger duppy, spook to all that too young to understand the phantasms and the many shades of loss and death, with revenant, visitant, and weight.

I- as this young lady with keen mental suffering or distress over affliction or loss; sharp sorrow; painful regret, with a grin of that a young woman singed and

driven backlit by flame and she, knew that when she returned to the to her loft it would not be there- nor anything she left behind- like death- passed over and clean up and forgot to time that mends everything, she might wink at himself in all the fallen glass shards looking at herself as they fall- yet not helping herself more seeing on man in control of all human life, a medieval poet of a woman in the mirror given a lie for a life, burnt corked- minds just like the town- cities, and people within.

The smile of pain with sweet young kindness and keen understanding, hidden, still gripped by her face muscles of fear and horror, in the dark as she lies under and

over the pass, blocks away from the flames that are still licking the sides of buildings.

Nevertheless, still feeling the fiery heat and small burn and blood scabbing flesh, on her clothing, later, going to sleep out of exhaustion, she would feel fiery on the inside and out; it never- ever went away, that feeling of loss and pain, mislaying fear and death and time, with the place, misplacement of dropping everything, forgetting and without thought overlooking, sometimes deprivation, or the disappearance, of losing heart and mind, yet with privation, nonetheless, forfeiture, and overall waste, while incomplete, squandering to and whole, entire with full, and total, intact therefore uncut dissipation,

diminution, erosion, and reduction. The smile, it never- ever- ever- went away, if she remembered or had memories of all things past.

She felt the temperature rise, at this one spot where a person's standing above her as she was covered by nothing more than old newspapers, the might of the sun not rising yet given in, the immediate atmosphere ten degrees for an instant to which is going to come.

His nose detected a faint perfume on me, I had on- and was looking for something, I was not willing to entertain, the skin on the backs of his hands, on his face, chaired, and his face black as if he were coal mining- the only thing white about

him was his eyes. There was no time for the thoughts of... He takes off his helmet, he hangs his flameproof jacket neatly; on his one arm to stand over me.

He takes off his helmet, he hangs his flameproof jacket neatly; on his one arm to stand over me. He shows me his many luxuriously- on his hands and wrist, yet I was not into it all, I was groggy- and moody to say the least.

He- this man that stands before me- walked across the upper platforms of a high skywalk, and moving swiftly, whistling, hands in pockets, as if waking in a park without a care in the world. Like- I wondered if it all was a dream... or not?

So-o, positive he seemed at the last moment when disaster he comes to revelation, he pulled his hands from his pockets to show me his kid's photos on his phone- lost to the crazies of ending times events- I thought it was the end, that I was going to be wrapped or killed for the money in my pockets, thinking the worst at this point, along with this time and this place.

Now simply turned to a shadow of this large man and let him through is what I thought to do as I got into the fetal position, the air seemed charged with static and a new calm as if someone- had waited there- to show me hope, quietly, in only a moment before he came, I felt freedom, and I could not figure out why. ... O’er broken he falls to

me crying as a half-man, by grasping me in a hug as I have never had before in my life, held like a child in his arms. As if he needed me or something like a dad needed his kids.

He slid next to me, sides touching a halt in his weekend voice, the heels one inch from the concrete stairs leading downwards. The last few nights went off, he had had the most uncertain feelings about love and loss, and finding something to hold on to, as did I.

The sidewalk just around the corner here falls in collapse, moving in the starlight toward his fate of knowing they are gone. He had felt that a moment before he made the turn of me, someone had been there- and I would say that was me.

Before- he reached the corner, however, he slowed as if a wind had sprung up from nowhere to show him the way to me as if someone had called his name- as if it were God speaking to him.

Whistling slightly, he let the escalator waft him into the still night air before he came to me- in looking for an answer to life and about being like life. He walked toward the comer, thinking little at all about nothing, other than breaking through to the other side.

He walked out of the maglev station and along the midnight street toward the lowest point of ground where the silent and slick, self-propelled train slid soundlessly over top it is clear acrylic track light by

FiberOptics, only held down by the Earth in white massive posts, and let I let out with a great puff of warm air as I move without really think closer to the escalator rising to the upper suburb, at was more or less- a city within a city.

I was understanding it like never- the feeling of love for the stranger. I turn to look at him each time I move forward down the long run of steps, along the glass sidewalk, hung by cables, with on one night, underneath or so it was looking, something vanishing swiftly underneath, lawns and trees all around high up, about 600 feet up, I am, now- when I was only at 100 feet or so moments before, fast, like time, in the world that is fast-moving, before he could focus

his eyes or speak, I was gone. Yet, I felt as if he were not far behind me, now, and tonight, I slowed to a stop, thinking I would not mind if he were next to me as if protecting me from something like a child.

Reaching her hand out on the rail as she turned the corner, had heard the faintest whisper. His was in her inner mind, Breathing within and the same? She made a sharp turn at a 45-degree angle, the corner still hanging in the air. The atmosphere constricted exclusively, uniquely by someone standing very quietly there, waiting to take her hand so it felt?

The many autumn fall-like leaves blew, that was left just hang dangling on the branches over the moonlit and LED glass

pavement that changes color high up, held by stay-cables, in such a way as to make the girl who was moving there seems fixed above all the hassle to a sliding walk was the slowest thing around- that the modern person uses, the leaves carry her forward, as if not caring that there being disruptive to the moment, and not caring they are doing what comes in nature; careless and free letting the motion of the wind and take them away, like her hair in the breeze.

Her head was cupped and slightly bent over the handrail that was glass, like the sides, also to watch her shoes stir the circling leaves and above her head, she sees more swaying walkways above and below yet there not look at her to say yet she is

wondrous and looking at them. Passenger drones fly and race by pulsating soft humming whips and colors, milk-white faces like in a dream, the faces of that of slender and healthy, yet not as young as she is at this moment in time, even if aging was halted for all.

It was a look, of a pale surprise to see me a young girl out at this time of night by them I am sure of; and in it was a gentle ravenousness, emptiness, and starvation that touched over everything with tireless curiosity- they had towards a young life.

The dark eyes were so fixed on her she felt, as she moved ever so slowly to not have the bridge-like walkway move under her light footing, yet fast enough to escape

them and the world move too rapidly. She almost thought she heard the motion of her hands as she walked as they did as if all were at the same rhythm, and the infinitely small sound, of the marching in time, to the trolled step above and below.

-And-

There a man stood in the middle of the glass pavement waiting for the new days to start. Her dress was moving up to the gust of air from the trains below and above it, all whispered yet not as much as her headset that was implanted in her inner ears- that was next to invisible.

The white stir of lights and holograms and screens grabbing advertisements for a moment of useless

information whispering in the headset faces turning to look as it increases them when she discovered she was a moment away from suspended willow trees and hydroponic garden overhead made a great sound of letting down their misty lush rain.

I remember saying to this man- moments before and it looked within the brain of the headset- in retravel of thoughts: when people ask my age, I always say- 'Young- and insane. Isn't this a wonderful time of night even if I have them recording my every moment- even in the bathroom- at home and even the movements in bed it is all held in the database for all to payback- and despite everything that has transpired? I am teenaged and I am mentally deranged,

especially as manifested in a wild or aggressive way. Extremely enthusiastic, nevertheless, mad, insane, out of one's mind, deranged, and demented.'

Fingerprints and eyes read and scanned- with invisible beams- in ever steep or everything you touch is like stack charged to the touch- held in data recovery to understand good and bad, they know you more than you know yourself and that programed too- if you do not watch your back- and the only ones with guns of mass-distortion are the police officers in full suites. My dad says this to me always- I am MAD.

At that moment she felt she had said something quite wonderful, that she

never felt his love, yet just found what it could be. But instead, he stood regarding her with eyes so dark yet loving and shining in the wild lights around, and alive for the moment- even if feeling dead on the inside, when he felt this, she had said something quite wonderful to keep only if it was approved to keep in her own- mind.

The girl stopped and looked as if she might pull back in surprise to see him before her, but he knew his mouth had only moved to say hello, and then when she seemed too fascinated, entrance, beguile, and spellbind by the fallen angel on his arm and the eight-pointed star symbol with three chevrons under on his chest, he spoke again, saying about the war and the hugger.

‘Only the youth can save us...' he said, knowing her name was Milia. A moment has passed and under his breath, he said, ‘the real youth!’ I like that you have a child. Her name is Elody- she is already a star girl-she is the only one left I have, just like you will be. He said to me, ‘I want to give you her memories- keep them locked within as much as you can when the time comes, do as she did as she did when she did and don’t ask why, and you make history.’

... As if my life depended on it. 'Of course,' he said, 'you are my new undertaking, aren't you- the military mind garden?' And I am going to look out for you

as if you are my own, and in a way you are. ‘You remind me of my child.’ He spoke.

'And you must be the one to show me the way, this was code for the memories to be placed in my mind forever- of the wars past and to come.' She raised her eyes from his 'Of course,' he said, 'you're my new undertaking, aren't you?'

-And-

I am going to look out for you as if you are my own, and in a way you are. The expert symbols, 'Star Warrior.' Her voice trailed off some.

'How oddly you say that he said.' 'I'd have known it with my eyes shut,' he said, slowly. and have a full understanding, yet

you do not seem to know what it is I do or have done.

With a smell of- borborygmus activities. 'My late wife always complained about this,' he tittle-tattles, prattle, and jibber-jabber on. 'You get to the point never-ever wash it off wholly it is within you, and it seeps out.'

Complaining, powwowing, and natter- 'No, you don't,' she said, in awe of him. She was emptying her pockets, without once not thinking about moving away from the tightness that had now been made side by side.

He felt she was walking in a circle about him yet only in her mind, that was racing with many thoughts, turning him end

for end and inside and back out, likewise shaking him quietly- to see what made him tick, ‘coal mining,’ he said, that is what I must do now for work, dirty and not always honorable. For the silence had lengthened, only with her as she felt as if she had known him all her life. As a father… like- a humble man concerning his child or children in life was in a different- alternative time.

'It's nothing but eau de cologne to me.'

'Of course, that was the thought.' 'You do seem like a man to me?' 'Why not I keep this in my mind- yet, I knew he would have it in retrieval?' She gave herself time to think about the last thoughts that would be placed into text or stored in the data

servers all the time- even if time has ended. 'I don't know until this point if it's right or wrong- to have every thought and every moment recorded for history to not understand- or misconstrued.' She then turned her face away from his face to the sidewalk going toward other skyscrapers.

'Do you mind if I walk back with you?' 'No, I don't mind at all! And I know who you are.' She moves forward are you- come along. What are you doing out so late wandering around I asked? 'I have nothing left,' he said along with 'and was looking for you well.' 'How old are you- I asked him?' '51 he said.' I mean I am sure I could have done a lookup with my headset, and phone that is linked, yet that seems less

interesting, and I wanted the trust and troth to see- if.

The warm-cool-blowing night, they walked in on the glass pavement and there was the faintest breath of fresh strawberries, apricots, and all fruits in the air, in artificial gardens that seem to float in mid-air.

So, late in the year and we have fresh fruits, and she looked around and realized this was quite impossible, not so long back in antiquity- that man has come a long way.

There was only the girl walking with him now, her face bright as the fake snow in the moonlight that will fall when- man wants it too by artificial machinery, and she knew

she was working his questions around too much in her mind as if she had freedom too, seeking the best answers she could give. 'Well,' she said, walking onward?

Walking now farther than ever with some new, I like to smell things, look at things, and enjoy everything that this world has to offer, and sometimes stay up all night until the sun comes up, they walked on again in quiet and finally, she said, thoughtfully, 'the sunrise there it is its coming.'

'I'm not afraid of you at all, you know.' So many people are, and none of them are like you, he was surprised, in my way. 'Why should you be like them I asked?' Afraid of men and everything and anyone, I

mean really. 'But you are just a girl, after all...' ‘Right?' I suppose! She spoke.

He saw himself in her eyes almost looking thoughts and back again, suspended in two shining drops of bright water, that passed in the air, like as if that have lost gravity. In fine detail and style, the lines about his mouth, she studied, everything about his look, as if his eyes were two supernatural, preternatural, superhuman, inexplicable, unaccountable, and fantastic bits of vibrant marigolds that might capture and hold him intact.

Electricity was in the air and working within them, but what it was not the hysterical light of everything in the time and moments, strangely comfortable and

rare and gently flattering light of the towering buildings, cast on her young face as if softly lit by a candle.

Like this one time in a total power-failure, when he was a child, I recall a light dancing about my face like this; yet power outages are no longer feasible, I thought until now. Now have mass power-failure, my mother had found me and had already given me a nights kiss, and lit the last candle, next to my bed, and I was holding a book and was drawing breath like the book here I was then lost to dreaming were I then became the protagonist to my own story, as if in another time, nested in my newspaper and bundling of my reassesses, and qualm, misgiving, doubt, reservation, second

thought, worry, concern, anxiety, hesitation, hesitance, hesitancy, demur, reluctance, disinclination, and apprehension about the loss of feeling and comforts.

Brief hours of the night, have felt like a spiraling week in another time... of rediscovery like I feel you will have, soon so you know- I feel it in my bones; dimensions and drew comfortably around them, of such illumination that space lost its vast like, mother and son, alone, transformed, and fixed hoping that the power might not come.

... And I would see my mother again too soon... like you- you are having this moment I just know it. 'Do you mind if I ask' 'How long have you worked at being a coal miner?'

Her body was twitching and squirming like her mind, in the throes of wonder. The need to quench the fire raging in her brain was almost driving her crazy, to understand the pictures she was receiving in his thoughts of wisdom.

Where can- I purchase a copy of this then called a book- on history or remembrances of all the past? I see them within this dream of the past yet there is not a thing any, more are they?

Why?

Slowly dips beyond the horizon is a room full of them with pulp drapers, and the clocks have become as if on rhythm to my mind and head which was ache; I have searched everywhere online, and they all

seem to be in any language. Any suggestions would very much be appreciated.

'Ever since I was ten, I wondered about everything past and history and knowledge.'

'Did you ever read any of the books, was technology eliminated?' Yes, but only in this dream of being lost within I was once the writer of the longest in the world, yet I never saw it to completion, I dyed in the end in the dream and walked up here to give you this massage. He laughed and looked around- speaking softly about- joking that car were like being shot out of a canon in his dream of living in remembrances, and the love of life and one woman.

'The law and governments, has past bands on information, in the young mind of mind!' 'Oh, of course- freedom has been taken as it was then as it is now.' 'It's fine to work to lay day in and day out and hold thoughts that hold thoughts that give thoughts and want thoughts to be handed.'

Ashes angels- flying about, all the books have become, as they all went up years ago, around the year 3,000, the dream I am in is of 1913 as if I were to hold this for-you to have and pass on; why I cannot say- you must find that out on your own and you are the ay. Ashes to dust- of the work and the words slaved to make, for the dumb of kids, to keep- that is our official slogan 'ASH ANGELS.'

They walked still further in the modern ideas of life and garden, and the girl said, 'Is it true that long-ago writers made stories and recorded history and not electronic brain retrieval taken without well- by the governments?'

'No, let us keep walking on. Home to go to, she said.' Along with saying moments after- 'not everything that is fireproof, take my word for it.' 'Oddly strange.'

He laughed, a long time ago houses used to burn to the ground and were on one to two stories, by accident, and sometimes not, and they needed many men to stop the flames, it was done by hand, not robotics or

animated systems to do the world for them without thinking.

I heard once about not putting out a flame; in carelessness, she gazed over to look at him as if not of this world. I do not know.

The flame of light that gives life could end it, 'Why are you laughing?' he asked. 'And I am the one that would be called dumb.'

That is the rose garden over there, that is where I want to spend the morning! 'White blurs are houses- he called them the transportation capsules.' Smudged blur in the sky in the yellow haze, as homes- or those that do not have them come to places to sleep in 3 foot by 7-foot caskets like

rented rooms. ‘Sickness to humanities- I feel like a doghouse...!’ My uncle drove slowly on a highway once I remember, yet more like these people of today- crazy- MAD- ill-tempered.

'I don't know.' He started to laugh again and petered out, along with fading away, 'Why the rush to die young?' Then- I get the time and the laps of time, and time is less or more in one day or moment.

I have not even said anything that would be considered humorous, and you answer right off as if there is sarcasm, ridicule, satire, irony, scorn, sneering, and scoffing at everything that was said.

He rambled on, drove 25 miles an hour, and they jailed him for two days for

being a MAD man- pulling my hair for fun. 'So, it is not a dream you are from another time, are you? 'Isn't that funny, and sad, too?' 'You think too many things,' said the girl, uneasily about his racing mind.

'You never- ever stop to think about this until now, what I've asked you to recall why I am here.' 'Why do you think?' He stopped walking, to look down at her young sweet face, like a child, looking for candy, 'You are the oddball, she whispered under her breath.' 'I would imagine I would be if 1,084 years had passed, and 395,660 days (about 1083 and a half years).'

'You did mathematics- like- in your head?' Along with saying- 'How did you do that?' He said, looking at her, start doing

sums any numbers, here he points to her head- like computers, in your mind the numbers and the way to do them are now there, he was wise.

‘You were the first in the world.’ 'A pink blur I am to you? No, you're more than that, you should know!' He tapped the numerals on his nameplate on his chest, next to all the meatless in all colors stitched on his chair-colored sleeve.

'Well, does this mean anything to you,' he asked her. 'Haven't you any respect, for me this is rude?' 'Oh child, wake up!' 'I don't mean to be insulting.' 'You are...' she said. It's just, I love to watch people too much, I guess, and help them understand that you are the hope.'

'Yes,' she whispered; I will well be the one that stands in all-time like you.' She slowed her pace, walking past all the roses. 'Look at the jet cars racing on the elevated boulevards and hovering over our heads.'

'You're changing the subject, think about your life, and the ones to come!' He said, patting her on the head. ``From time to time, I think drivers don't know what grass is anymore, or flowers because they never see things slowly,' he said. 'If you showed a driver a green blur then yes maybe,' she said, '...Yes, sir, that's Earthy plant-life- who cares!'

‘I would say find your family, and start over, you’re a child, yet, and that will

change soon, there is no need to live on the street or live-in rented rooms.’

‘I will never go back!’

I am not into their lifestyle...

~*~

I am not into killing things, and ending life, even of that of plants, I like to smell things and look at things. I stay up all night, sometimes just looking is that odd for someone like me. 'I would think not.' 'Watch the sunrise and just walk.'

Thoughtfully, thinking about other people; showing mush kind thoughts, care, and consideration; considerate, you say this even forgiveness, now, and that is your type so why not forgive and forget, and find

them, someday you may not have them to go too, they walked on again in silence and finally, she said, 'you know, this already, don't you.' 'Sorry for everything has become your life.'

'I'm not afraid of you at all, I think- I know what is coming.' He was surprised by me saying that being smart and dumb.

'Why should you anyway?' You will be a star, in many ways!' 'So many people are born to do this, and you are. I believe in you!' I am frightened of change and revelation, and this all comes to a fast end. 'I am just a woman, after all...' No, a woman can be more than that, and show them all!

Tears- now falling suspended in two shining drops of bright water, she saw

herself in his eyes, dark and tiny, in fine detail, looking back she could see the child within that she would become, the lines about his mouth- in grief and sorrow, everything there, as if her eyes performed by or involving a supernatural power to see beyond or operation bits of amber glowing within as if pulled out of time and space to see the dream inside the mind in positive and death, that might capture and hold her to see the light- in a new time.

He said- Children like you, in a power-failure, a rediscovery, of such illumination, to space lost its vast dimensions and drew comfortably around them, look deep into my past- see my life- see how it was, see my child life, and her

life, she is you, now- you have taken her mind over- you now have her soul. transformed are you now- unlike any other around you- you have the remembrances of all that is past they do not want kids like you to evoke, hoping that the power- can be held over you- so there is no resistance, be the fight, they might come on, all too soon... again, this will come.

She said to him you- ponder, reflect, deliberate, meditate, contemplate, muse, and cogitate saying this, 'you think too many things, it is not safe to think for yourself.' 'I rarely watch 'covering screens television,' or stay indoors. She said, 'some call me old-fashioned.' That is right, along with crazy, 'MANNESS' is my claim to fame;

nevertheless, too much time on my hands for crazy thoughts. 'Have you seen hologram- billboards in the suburbs beyond the cities?

Everywhere you look, screens are screaming for your attention, all you see are kids with see-through phones, and faces smashed into a fantasy world, linked to their headset. 'I remember when newspapers would do the trick,' he said.

Nonetheless, cars started flying by so rapidly they had to stretch the images to go along with the speed, the advertising is so out there and outlandish, so it would last in the mind when it ripped into it by our overseers.' 'I didn't know that!' 'I do, and its

sickness, and 'MADNESS' they have done to you, you're not the CRAZY one,' he said.

He laughed suddenly and unexpectedly, rudely, or curtly, steeply; precipitously. 'I- bet, I know something else you don't know, what if I knew this would happen?' They made the grass grow this morning just to cut it down by night, yet not by man.' Like they would even care to look at grass. When most of life is up in the air 200 feet on skywalks, and skyscrapers, with plant-like intermediate open spaces of negative spaces seeming to just hang as if flitting about, like the trees- also in the floating lands masses at all points in the air.

She suddenly could not remember, her true life, she was now- 'not,' if she had

known this or not, she was now his child's soul, and it made him quite cantankerous as if the life had come back to him from the heavens or favor from purgatory as if all sins were forgiven and she would not need to linger in hells purgatory.

'And if you look, the days are slowing now,' She nodded at the sky- there is a moon, I know, yet I don't remember- that it should be to me anymore like days are changed to me now- and the time in one day.'

She had not looked for a long time to see what the moon had become. It was just too sad, and sad only. They walked in silence, looking at all the stars, none of the sun, they knew. Thoughtful, yet

uncomfortable, along with clenching quite which he shot her accusing gazes.

When they reached the end of the city lines all its lights were blazing behind- and the lay of the land ahead- of mountains.

'What's going on, you can see the sun, and miles ahead- what is going to happen?' It is before all the smog starts, that is why. He had rarely seen that many house lights, at this time before. It was awe-inspiring, to say the least.

'Oh, just my mother and father and uncle sitting around, all day doing nothing there is no work you see, talking about death, and wanting death to come, to be out of the pain of life, and they drug up. To kill the pain and themselves slowly it is like

being a pedestrian, only rarer.' My dad had me arrested when I wanted to help, times before and I am the criminal- for reporting this... did I tell you that I have a record? 'Also arrested by a cop that called himself a 'DICK-' for being a pedestrian.' Oh, we're most peculiar these days with the CRAZY AND RETARDED, like me- I suppose!'

He just looked at me, with a quirked smile. 'Talking about it, what do you think?' 'We live in mad times, mad times I say!' He said back blisteringly. Crap- laughed at this. 'Goodnight, he said walking away!' She started up yet another higher walk- as he seemed to vanish to the clouds below starting to form. Then she remembered everything with curiosity and much wonder.

'Are you genuinely happy, she looked into the girl's memories, that she became?' She was in the past but not now, 'Am I what- now?' She started to cry out. But she was gone-running in the moonlight as if the guns of wartime girls wanted her dead, it was hard to breathe, she was lost in the visions.

Her eyes shut gently as the bullets fly over her face and body in the heat of battle. 'Happy, far from it! Of all the nonsense, this was unfair to say the last.' She stopped feeling at that moment the pain- in her mind as she was ripped back to her opened eyes and time.

He put his hand into the hole of the-glove holding them where they buckled on

his fingers- then his one finger exposed is pressed down- on a plate of his front door and let it know his touch to open into his apartment. The glass front door slid open, behind all the other glass walls, that also reflect the tv channels. This is private, he said to today's standards I think not. He thought to himself, quietly.

Of course, I am not happy about what I have done to that little girl, yet it must be that way- she is the future of life as we once knew it. What she thinks right now is not what I wanted- yet what is needed. All the death and distortion all at once. I am not pleased with myself at this point.

I feel like a dad that has left his child gets slotted. He asked the quiet rooms

to speak up and play the news of the day and world- and the inner-city limits. Wall to glass wall, of coverage of death and misrepresentation, perversion, twisting, falsification, and misreporting.

He stood looking up at an appliance, hanging from the open rafters for artificial respiration; trelliswork and network along with wires and pipes, in the hall and quickly and unexpectedly remembered that something lay hidden behind the espalier, filigree, plexus, and something that seemed to peer down at him now- was what looked to be an eye, tracing his every move- even the bathroom where open and glass-walled, like some of the floors.

Quickly moving away, along his eyes, yet they got them anyways, quick- not quick enough, it called out his name in face recognition. What a strange meeting on a strange night, and what a strange place this is.

He recalled nothing, after that point when the eyes linked, his mind was whipped of all thoughts, until approved, like it saves one afternoon a year ago, and the rest is replaced with dream-like subconscious when he had met an old man in the park, and they had talked… and that was okay to keep, shaking his head, he thought wrong, and the voice in his mind to him to stop. He looked at a blank wall, also now updating

like him in a way, as the forces over him reset.

Astonishing, the young girl's face was there, and it was kept, quite beautiful in memory. As if hacked to be lasting, he knew his next thought would say that anyway, thought of mind cannot be stopped. Yet if disciplined.

She had a very thin face seen faintly in a dark room in the middle of the night, lasting in his mind, dream-like. While there that is left that is you- rouse to see clock telling the time and see the face a-glow, and the hour and the minute and the minute and the second- still- calm -tranquil dreamlike, and the ticking is all the remains?

'Whatever he thought,' valued himself- of that separate self, the unconscious nincompoop that operated ranting at moments, entirely autonomous of the mind, costume, and morals.

He peeped behind the wall. Whereby like a *scary*- mirror, besides, her silhouette like a ghost, with hair covering the face. Objectionable; for how many personalities did you grasp that refracted your sunrise to thou?

Spirits moved beside often- he sought for an analogy, gained item in his work-torches, flaming away continuously they sniffed out. Whence unusually did different spirits' faces take of you- moreover

remainder to you your composition, your private trembling solicitude.

What unimaginable strength concerning description the daughter had; she transpired like the keen spectator of a puppet show, awaiting specific glint of an eyelid, respectively gesticulation of his hand, per flick of a digit, the time where it originated. Whereby long spun became they strolled contemporaneously. Three minutes? Five?

Yet, wherewith great that season seemed immediately. Whereby gigantic a figure she held on to the scene before him; everything was like a shadow she cast on the wall with her slight dainty body! He

perceived that if his eye yearned, she might blink.

Furthermore, if the fibers of his jaws stretched gradually, she would divide long before he would. Why he recollected, immediately that I remember of it, she resembled to be arranging for me there, in the street, so damned late at nighttime.

... He inaugurated the bed-chamber door. It was like developing into the chilly marble room of a crypt subsequent the moon had set. Thoroughgoing eclipse, not a trace of the lustrous globe outward, the glasses tightly sealed, the antechamber a vault world where no note from the numerous cities could comprehend. Every chamber was not empty. He admitted. The

little mosquito- dainty dancing hum in the draft, the electrical murmur of a mysterious wasp snug in its unique flushed warm incubator.

Some tunes were powerful just so-o, he could grasp the piece. He underwent his simpler slide away, decrease, laminate above, furthermore, resting on itself like a wax skin, the essence of a fabulous candle burning exceedingly long plus now deflating and now gone out. Twilight. Seclusion. Darkness. He was not satisfied. He was not comfortable. He said the statements to himself. He acknowledged this as the valid nature of rendezvous.

He diminished his optimism- like a veil and the girl had run off beyond the

garden with the veil and there was no way of maintaining to tap on her doorway and supplicate for it following- like moonlight.

Internally turning on the light with his thoughts of mind he believed how this room would look, as if would change color to his mood. His companion stretched on the bed, as before as canvas.

Exposed and aloof, as a body illustrated on the hood of an automobile, her eyes fixed on this young lady, to the canopy by ghostly threads of steel that was the bed frame, harmonized. To the lights and the sounds, affinity, magnetism, and sensuality. The thought was love, relish, and embrace needed for contentment.

Including in her ears the minute mind taking earplugs, the thimble radiotelephony links to everything, and everyone tamped securely- never coming out, furthermore, an electronic sound or the wireless world, of music and talk, TV and dialogue and a translator to all languages, coming in on the border of her inactive spirit and sleep. The chamber was indeed hollow. Every midnight the tides came in and transported her off on their great tides of sound or other places, floating her off, as if wide-eyed, approaching morning.

There had existed no blackness of full night in the last two years that Melissa had not bathed that the other pools, ought not enthusiastically to go down in it

concerning the thread time. The chamber was freezing though he perceived he could not recuperate.

He prepared not to yearn to destroy the screens and crack the sliding windowpanes, for he did not want the moon to come into the room, a first in years it was to see a full bright moon.

Consequently, with the soul of a guy who will depart in the next hour for lack of oxygen, He welcomed his way toward his open, cool bed, next to this young female child. The moment his foot hit the target on the rug, he knew he would hit such an article.

It was not unlike the atmosphere he had encountered before applying the

monopolization and nearly hitting the girl down. His foot, emitting fluctuations ahead, held back imitations of the tiny wall beyond its pathway-level as the foot swung.

His foot propelled. The article furnished a faint jingle and started from near health it the night. He reached extremely snug and welcomed the personality on the shaded bed in the utterly featureless duskiness. Relishing to the submissive lover. The breath coming out of her and him was the equivalent of the nostrils was so faint it agitated only the most distant fringes of life, a petite leaf, a black feather, a singular thread of young girls' hair.

He still did not want outside information. He stretched out his hands to the air, world, and heavens above considered removing the star- carved silver plate from his uniform, gave it a flick to close the latch in the back... In his mind- a pair boys glanced up at him in the nightlight, the ghost of his other kids- one his miniature hand-held a ball of fire; each with a combination of pale moonstones aglow next to the manufactured river- that ran of clear water over which, run past his apartment window, as the life of the world, running along with, not touching them.

'The young girl in his bed!' Her appearance was like a snowflake coated bar upon which rainfall might fall, however, it

underwent no storm; above which clouds sway relinquish their emotional shadows, but she perceived no umbra. There simply survived the chanting of the thimble wasps in her tamped- shut ears, and her eyes all glass, and whiff going in and out, softly, faintly, in and out of her nostrils, she was perfect, lost in a dream that I was in reading ever chapter like a book of the past is now not. Moreover, she was not worrying whether it came or went, went, or came, or came-out.

The article he had sent tumbling with his foot now glinted beneath the frame of his bed. The small crystal necklace, of a girl that was his relative, of sleeping pills which briefly today had been charged with

10 medicines of lack of air to the lungs including which presently lolled uncapped and abandoned in the light of the tiny beacon.

While he stood yonder the heaven protecting the dwelling shrieked. There was an enormous ripping vibration as if two giant palms became torn thousands of drops fall from above like black sheeting coming down the inseam. To wake up and have it been real, and not a dream. The Rains have come at last.

He was done in half. He felt his chest hacked down and split apart, like the young girl beneath. The jet-bombs performing over, spreading over, going over, one two, one two, one two, then five of

them, nine of them, twelve of them, all with water spraying- individual and 1 and 1 and extra and another and extra, did all the screaming for him- of: ‘OH- MY- YES, as the young woman, was thrashing also to the thundering storms- in squeezing with her hands with her palms the bed sheets.’ Was it running, or the manufactured water controlling- to make it happen as the jets when past? After it was like a hurricane, like never-seen-before to all of us of the modern city.

She withdrew her mouth like a child, and let their shriek come down and out between her bare teeth, of the feelings of fulfillment. The house shook to the pounding of the thundershowers. Occasional

thunder- then built of light went out in his and her head. Exquisite...!

The dream vanished, and it was all true, it was a reality. He felt his hand plunge toward the mouthpiece of his headset. The jets were gone, as the storm continued. He considered his lips touch, brushing the mouthpiece of the receiver.

I treasure back to when, in a past life when I was a rail worker- before time travel, I liked many other guys on one side and guys on the other with the hope of meeting up in the middle… slaved, to do what could not be achieved. Braking rock and make toenails they did it all fast, at the station is the start, come on and let us go on this trip… all the people and all the kids, as

they see the train steam near them as it comes ever so closer, as they stand with their boxes and cases, do you see them holding their tickets ready for their trip of a week and a day? Hoping to see it all on the day that goes from night's moon to sun, it was all fun and yet a fresh start, in a new world for them.

Bell ringing out… Do you hear it? Do you see the puff-puffs of the steam- as it moves past the water tower, do you see the signaler, braking jumping cars? Clouded puff- do you see- woo- woo! How trains have changed, I have seen the piston pushing hard, the wheels turn not fast, and not yet slow, do you see them moving with all the weight they have to pull? Red- white and

blue she is the locative No. 19 that is, they call her a girl- do you know why? She pulls her coal behind, and the people cars are in red, do you see, the coal care is blue, heat- with tons of smoke and the nose feels the air, do you see what it is doing?

The steam is spraying as it rushes past and stops, with a sequel, huff- huff- huff- it puffs, as we step on, brakeman, engineer, and conductor, and the one that runs it all is the engineer, the train driver. Hard and hot work do not you see, as the man sweets for doing this non-stop. This makes steam; did you know that? Sure, you did… two blasts of the horn and where are on are way things to the engineer. The driver- you remember what he is called?

Has his head out the window must of the time… do you know why? To see what is up and coming his way, do you see the animals on the tracks getting out of the way too?

To what color is the car in the back and what is it called? I remember times past, as we make a stop for water, do you see the man turn the wells from car to car what is he called and what is he doing to remember? Unfamiliar places, cities, and towns, all the places around, and look at what was found, with the sound? Of the huffing and puffing- and the wheels shaving forward on the ground. I remember how my little girl loved trains, and wherever she is I hope she runs a magical railroad. Those are

my wishes for her in her time of death- to the other side.

‘The same yet different. Different yet the same in so many ways, this world to the past!’ From one Marcel to another, he thought, and giggled in his mind to the craziness of that thought, to think I was only a writer for amusement with a story about a girl, in times of both discomforts, never thinking it was all going to come true.

Part: 2

(Back)

'Crisis infirmary.' A terrifying whisper. He responded that the stars had been crushed by the character of the black jets furthermore that in the daylight the

Earth would be resolved as he attained trembling in the dark and let his mouth go on traveling and moving.

They had this device. They had two computers. One of them slid feathers into your stomach like a black cobra underneath an echoing well watching for all the beloved liquid and the obsolete assumed yonder. It swallowed up the inexperienced material that proceeded to the summit in a gradual boil.

Prepared gulps of the darkness? Did it engulf out all the germs gathered with the years? It served in stillness with an uncommon note of essential suffocation including blind searching. It became an Eye.

The indifferent administrator of the device could, by wasting a unique optical headgear, stare into the soul of the character that he was tapping out.

Something did the eyewitness. He did not reply. He accompanied but did not see what the eye examined. The intact method was not unlike the digging of a hollow in one's garden.

The gal on the bed was no more mysterious than a dense layer of lustrous rock, all must be entered. Travel on, anyhow, elbow the nuisance down, slush up the vacuum, if such a person could be transported out in the beat of the pull serpent. The engineer reached smudging a tobacco pipe. The significant- device of

others was operating exceedingly. The separate device was operated through an equivalently disinterested peer in non-stainable reddish-brown overalls.

This device drew all the plasma of the frame of the torso furthermore substituted it with fresh lifeblood and immunotoxin. 'Prepared to flush 'em out both ways,' said the laborer, being over the soundless gentlewoman.

'End this!' He said, along with- 'never- ever use preparing the belly if you don't clean the blood. Omit that essence in the blood moreover the blood spreads to the brain like a hammer, smack, several times into the brain, just quits- and let her go, and it's all over.'

'I was simply telling,' said the laborer. 'Are you prepared?' Said the man in a healthy uniform. They shut the computers nervously. 'We are finished.' His rage did not even brush them- with their cold feelings- in not caring to care. Others stood with the fag- fume curling throughout their noses including into their eyes without giving them nictitate or peeps.

'This's fifty bulls.' 'Chief, why don't you tell me if she'll be all right- or this was all a waste?' 'Sure, she'll be okay- here memories were kept- and that is all that truly matters after all. He spoke. This was nothing more than mind retrieval- and fast death.

We the traditional essence fit in our case here- you can receive the life in the database, it cannot perceive her immediately. As I said, you take out the old and put in the novel and you are okay, that is life after all.' 'Sick is what it is!' He spoke.

This was here planned death, at this time at this moment, governed, by the people for the people. She was not of worth. 'Go-F*CK- Yourself!' He screeched. 'Neither of you are M. D's. HOW- IS THIS LAWFUL? Didn't they send an M.D. from Crisis?' 'Hell! they sent two- jackass retard's, the laborers just winked and walked past saying take it up with the courts- of the county. 'She died; I don't think that is needed...'

'Pity then is it not? He whispered, 'doing my job.' Said the other to the worker, as to take out boxes of junk for a home in the past. An in that box was a story- lost and never read, in the front part of the high-rise- she was lit aflame with kerosene- pumped from a red-first responder-truck with the number 450 on the sides, the bodies like this girl- just like a book of no worth, with nothing, said, nothing to give, like so many others most children under 10, estimated.

'We understand these quandaries nine or ten an evening. Got so many, beginning a few years ago- we need the room for the ones that have something to give the world, we had the extraordinary line-ups developed. With the visible

spectacles of passage, that was original; the bottom is ancient. Y'all do not need an M.D., in a state- like this; all you require is two jacks-of-all-trades, cleaning up the PULL OF **-Heifer-** *SHIT*- dilemmas in less than a half an hour- to 15 minutes.

'Look you Jackoff's 'Get,'' he stood by the door- 'we got to go.' Recently I had another call from a 4-year-old that was let go. 'Like pages to burn, he said, just like books... a waste of time.' One block from here.

The view of the girl- child in a cardboard shoebox was a pain to his mind, he could see them dumping out the door too- and lit up- like paper- at 450 degrees- Kelvin. ‘No space to have them placed, is

the slogan.’ You could move them if you have the money- to outside, yet that is too costly, for most in poverty. Cry if you need it. Keep quiet, it is all the same.

Just before with the child- the eyes of puff adders regarded their quantity of computer and tubes, their cause of water grief and the slow dark residue of anonymous tissue and strolled out the door- and lit up- like wasted varmint and pus. Nothing was placed in the database for her- not even an ID number. He then at that moment at that time dropped into a chair and looked at this little lady of the glass walls in hologram for the last time like all. Never to be remembered again and discharged from all minds.

Her discrimination to her eyes- stayed closed now, mildly, and he put out his hand to hold the warmth of inspiration on his palm. 'A - Child' he said, at the end- before the start. There are likewise many of us, he deemed. There are billions of us and that is exceedingly numerous. Nobody perceives anyone. Guests arrive and defile you. Strangers proceed and separate your heart, mind, and soul with tubs and fling you to the insinuators.

Guests take your blood. F*ck- God for this, who were those chaps? I never perceived them before in my experience! Moiety an hour passed. The bloodstream recovered to give to others, and it seemed to have done a new thing to him. Life for life

he said. 'Okay then...' That was the day he started the rebellion of the star.

Her cheeks were pink, and her lips were very fresh- eyes once blue, and wondrous and full to the many colors- other than gray- and they looked soft and relaxed, even in understanding something clearly at last. The girl's name was Steffanie, now only someone else's blood and transplants, and DNA exchange. If only someone else's flesh, brain, and consciousness.

If simply they could have exercised her wisdom along to the dry cleaner's moreover drained the pockets and cooked and washed it furthermore deblocked it plus brought it in the morning. If barely... He got up and placed back the shades and

started the windowpanes far-flung to let the midnight air inside.

It was two o'clock in the A.M. Was it only an hour ago, I was in the sky walkway, and him coming in, as she lay in her miniature coffin-like rent room, and the darkroom and her foot kicking the side and top the little ship in a bottle? The air was tight yet clean. the dome light above not particularly bright, when on. Only room to roll from side to side in the same place your body lay before. She was sick of this life. Hardly an hour, although the world had decreased down including sprung up into a unique and neutral application.

Chuckling left beyond the moon- the melanistic lawn of the apartment where she

smiled so modestly and so-so solemnly. Their laughter was relaxed and hearty and not forced in any way, coming from the house that was so brightly lit this late at night while all the other houses were kept to themselves in darkness.

She heard the voices talking in her mind, chatting, telling, addressing, informing, weaving, reweaving their anodyne network.

He walked out within the portholes doors and divided the garden, outwardly still deeming it. He endured outside the eloquent horse in the adumbrations, considering he swayed even tap on their entry and murmured, 'Let me come inside.’

I will not say anything. I simply want to overhear. What is it you're saying?' However alternatively he stood there, very raw, his face a hood of ice, harking to a little voice (the girl?) moving along at an easy pace: 'Well, following all, this is the age of disposable membrane. Blow your nose on the body, plug them, rinse them away, lead for varied reasons, go back, wash. Everyone practiced everyone else's coattails.

How are you thought to root for the homestead organization meanwhile you do not also have a business or know the names?

For that affair, what shade pullovers are they diminishing as they amble out on to the courts?' He walked back to his dwelling,

left the glass wide, reviewed everything back to him they had taken as data, tucked the blankets about him thoroughly, yet this time all alone, with only the memories, and sad masturbation of going lefty. Furthermore, suddenly lay down with the moonlight on his cheek and nude body with his firm grip of himself pointed like a projectile to space above- bones and on the grim ridges in his brow, amidst the moonlight infused in each eye to form a silver torrent there. One dollop of the tempest.

One, the young girl. Two, the love of his life, three, the war for life. Four, fire, One, the girl, two, sex. One, two, three, four, five, need air, girl, child, fire, sleeping

tablets, being a man, disposable tissue, coattails, blow, wad, flush, her, the child, the young girl, my children, the fire, tablets, membranes, blow, wad, color. One, two, three, one, two, three! Thundershower. The mind spins and pounds- like the hand he has no authority of a child has been the hands that move his, all in his head, a match said hospice- replacement, yet she is new to me in my head and a child of fourteen years. She is the same age as my kids, I said- out of exhaustion.

A different drop then sprays about his face. Prefer a third. The young woman. A fourth. The young woman- the warmth of temptations and thoughts at cold tonight. The hurricane winds- her orgasms of many-

in my head and see through to the other side. The relative laughing about me feeling shy with his child’s simples matched to me as if I am wrong for thinking too much in modesty.

Thunder tumbling all around me inside and out. The complete world streaming down. The fire welling up in a volcano-like-a special child at lust. Total speeding on down encompassing in a spouting roar furthermore revering stream toward daylight. 'I don't remember anything anymore,' he said, and let a sleep-lozenge dissolve on his tongue. At nine in the morning, his bed was empty- yet this new love felt as by his side- a new feeling of comfort.

He then got up immediately, his spirit pumping- moreover ran underneath the hall and ended at the galley door. Some toast jumped out of the silver toaster- from the wall itself, moved followed by a spidery alloy helper that flooded it with melted butter-and jelly in the wall then out to him.

The eyes of the new lover girl within his and in his head- ever-so- strong and kind- more than loving as she watched the toast delivered to her plate. The fourteen-year-old child was in- madding love with her new man.

She had both ears plugged with electronic bees that were humming the hour away. She looked up suddenly, saw him, and nodded. 'You all, right?' she asked, within

his mind, thanks to the electronics. The girl was an expert at lip-reading from 14 years of apprenticeship at head-inserted ear-thimbles.

She bowed again- and he could see as if there was inside her body. She set the toaster snapping away at an extra piece of bread- again by the thought of his mind. He sat down, with her force inside him to do it. His partner said, 'I don't understand how? I should be so hungry.' 'You-?' 'I'm Starving.' 'The last twilight,' he started. 'Didn't nap well. Feel lousy,' she said. M-mm he said back to the young lover. 'God, I'm starved. I can't comprehend this.'

'Last night-' he said repeatedly. She saw his lips casually. 'What about last

night?' 'Don't you remember?' 'Oh, do and you were wonderful, she said sweetly.'

'Something? Do we have a wild appetite or something? Appear like I have an aftereffect. God, I am craving. What was there?' 'A few characters,' he said. 'That's what I imagined took place yet, I am sure you will have no understanding of that.'

She nibbled her toast as if she were doing it for him and the other way 'round. 'Sensitive abdomen and lower, but I'm ravenous as all-get-out. Suppose I didn't do anything unwise at the gathering.' 'No,' he said, ostentatiously. The toaster speared out a bit of buttered bread for him. He squeezed it in his hand, seeming grateful for this new desire, worship, passion, and devotion. 'You

don't seem so hot yourself,' said his newfound crush. In the late evening, it drizzled, and the entire world was dim grey.

He was held in the gallery of his apartment, placed on his material with the star flashing across it. He stood peering up at the air-conditioning vent- and said, 'so odd,' in the lobby for a long time. His love in the salon left him behind- in his mind until his return delayed long enough from studying her dialogue to glimpse up.

'Say,' she said and came back to bed with me. 'The man's logic about this!' 'Yes,' he said. 'I needed to talk to you, anyway.' He hesitated. 'He grabbed some capsules in the bottle to see you tonight.' 'Oh, I wouldn't do that,' she said, surprised. 'You could

overdose.' 'The bottle was empty.' 'I wouldn't do a thing like that, she said. Why would I do a thing like that?' He had not a clue until remembering the men, and what he said.

'Possibly you took pills and to forgot and took two more-to sleep and five more to remember to get up and forgot again- that you needed to do all and took two more- to not feel the way you do- now and remained so dopy you cached right on continuously you should see the physician.' 'Heck,' she replied, 'what would I order to go furthermore do such a silly thing like that for?' 'I don't know,' he announced.

She remained quite unmistakably encouraging him to go. 'I didn't do such,'

she said. 'Nevermore in a billion years.' 'All correct if you say so,' he answered. 'That's everything the young lady replied.' She transformed back into her scenarios of life. 'What's on this midday?' He urged tiredly.

She did not glance up from her lines again. 'Well, this is a play that begins on the wall-to-wall circuit within ten seconds. All sent me my share this daylight.

I threw in some box tops. They write the dialogue including one element desiring. It is a unique approach. The homemaker, that is me- the little girl thought, is the lacking piece. He needs what was taken. I will be there. Meanwhile, it gets time for the removed lines, all gaze at me out of the three walls plus I say the lines: Here, for

example, the gentleman says, `What do you believe of this complete plan, girl- Kasandra Natalie?'

Furthermore, he glances at me loafing here mid-stage, discern?

-And-

‘I say- I tell' She interrupted and ran her finger below a line in the text.' 'I presume that's accurate!' Furthermore, suddenly they go on by the entertainment continuously he says, 'Do you agree to that, Ms. Natalie!' ... And I say, `I certainly do!' Isn't that the game, Bud?'

He stood in the passage gazing at her. 'It's certainly fun,' she answered. 'Whichever the performance is about?' 'I

plainly stated to you. These people are named, and they are reading from the memories.' 'Yes.' 'It's entertaining-remembering what was read. It will be also more pleasurable meanwhile we can allow having the fourth wall hologram connected to the apartment glass walls. Wherewith long spun you terminate before we save up and get the fourth surface screen shredded out and a fourth wall-TV put in?

It's only two thousand bucks.' 'That's one-third of my annual monthly pay.' 'It's only two thousand bucks,' his sweet young lover responded.

-And-

'I should imagine you'd examine me seldom. If we must have a fourth glass wall

hologram TV, why would it be simple like this room was not ours solely, but all kinds of extrinsic people's rooms- in here with us always- that would be great- no?

We could obey without a few things.' 'We're previously doing externally a few items to pay for the third surface screen. It was put in barely two months ago, remember?' 'No, you would not remember, you're not her- this is all about them making you spend money, you don't have.'

'Is that all it was?' It was not even a day later that she sat looking at him for a long moment, saying she was his new partner. 'Well, good-bye, dear.' 'Good-bye, baby,' he said. He paused and swung around.

'Makes it have a felicitous conclusion?' 'I haven't seen that far.' He strolled over, read the last page, bent, collapsed the dialogue, and returned it to her.

The thundershower was decreasing away, and the girl continued exercising in the center of the sidewalk looking at him getting ever-so smaller as he made his way down to the ground leaves, with her head looking downwards, and the few drops falling on her face- mixing with her tears of missing him already- she was in love yet, she wondered if he was back.

He marched out of the dwelling into the torrents- spring debris. She smirked when she saw Bud. 'Say Love you- in his

mind back looking up blowing a kiss to her as he did every day before, as nothing changed- between the women!' 'Move on' he said to himself- 'by not.'

He said love and then said, that is when he ran in to- whom he thought was his child Elody, then she said- 'I'm still insane you know.' The storm feels so-o good. I fancy walking in the rain. 'I don't believe I would like that,' he said as you do- I get wet enough in the mines. 'You sway if you tried.' 'I never-ever have.' She licked her lips to the wetness running down her face. 'The shower is savory- good.' She looked at something in her hand- saying I want you to keep this. 'What've you got there?' He replied. 'I

suppose this is the last of the dandelions this age.’

I did not believe I would obtain one in the yard this late. Have you ever heard of rubbing it under your jawbone? Look.' She felt her chin with the rose, laughing. 'Why?' 'If it rubs off, it suggests I'm in love.' Has it- or now feel it?' He could hardly do anything else but stare into her eyes. 'Well?' The girl answered.

'You're yellowish beneath there.' 'Excellent! Let us try YOU now.' 'It won't work for me.' 'Here.' Before he could leave, she had put the dandelion beneath his chin. And said thank you- giving a side hug, he drew back, and she smiled. 'Hold still- the self-developing and printing and web

downloading camera to a photograph- as it loved into view for an awe moment!' She peered under his chin and frowned.

'Well?' He answered. 'What a stigma,' she responded. 'You're not in love with me I know- or her either.' 'You're a broken man!' Along with saying- 'And- working to death.' 'Yes, I am!' 'It doesn't show, though, right?' 'I am very much in love with you she said!' He tried to charm up an expression to fit the words, but there was no presentation.

'I am!' She said again, 'Yes, please don't look that way- I love you.' You are a child, he said. 'YOU NO NOTHING OF LOVE. and you do, I have seen.'

'It's that dandelion,' he answered. 'You've practiced it all up on yourself. That's how it won't work for me.' 'Likewise, that must be this.

Oh, promptly I've flustered you, I can see I have; I'm sad, really I am.' She rubbed his rose to his chin and said it was fine. 'Neither,' he said, hurriedly, 'I'm all right.' 'I've got to be working soon, so say you pardon me. I don't want you to be annoyed with me for feeling what human nature is.' 'I'm not offended. Shocked, certainly.' 'I've got to go to see my shrink now for this I am sure- love is also crazy to feel for someone you don't know.

They asked me to go to work, they own my home. I surrendered up something

to say. She thought- I do not understand what he thinks of me.

He says I am a normal onion! I keep him busy stripping away the stories.' 'I'm likely to understand you need the therapist yet not for loving someone,' said Bud. 'Then what?' He took a gasp and let it out and at last said, 'No, more like PTSD.'

‘Life is like a game of cards, even when you don’t have the best of hands, you have to play the game the best you can- and see what happens.’

'The therapist wants to gain knowledge, like- I go out and explore nearby elevated parks and view the birds and accumulate butterflies, and flowers and even grass.'

'I'll bestow you my gathering someday to him.' 'Good.' 'They require me to understand something I do with all my time. I inform them that seldom- I just sit and think. Although I will not explain to them what. I have them moving.

Furthermore seldom, I perceive them, I prefer to put my energy terminal, same this, and let the drizzle into my mouth. It undergoes just like wine. Ought you to ever try this?' 'No, I- love living like this' 'You should have forgiven me, haven't you?' This all took place in the mind in conversations. 'True.' He imagined this. 'Okay, I have. God grasps why I need to. You are uncommon, you are provoking, yet you are easy to forgive- you are a child of

wonder. You say you're fourteen?' 'Well-next month I will well be for sure.'

'How strange. How unusual. Including my companion, thirty years was her end, furthermore yet you appear so much older at times. He said when he is now home with his new partner. I can't get over it, how much you remind me of her.' 'You're wonderful yourself, Mr. Bud.

Sometimes, I even forget you are a coalminer. Now, may I make you angry again?' 'Go onward.' 'How did it begin? How did you get into this? How did you choose your profession and how did you happen to remember to take the position you hold?

You are unlike the others. I have seen a few; I grasp. If I talk, you look at me.

Meanwhile, I spoke something about the moon, you glanced at the moon, last bedtime.

The next day he sees the same girl before him, and she is- still very much in love, the others would never- ever do that.

-And-

Like before on his way to work the girl- ‘The others would wander off and leave me speaking, yet not you.’ You are my best, aren't you? Is that love I feel?

'Maybe so-o.' He spoke.

Part: 3

Astir warned me. No individual has time anymore for anyone else. You are one

of the few who settle for me? Elody, he called her, mistakenly- as if his child, you understand this, ‘I am not who you think I am.’

The girl- When she kissed him it was all wrong, yet sweet. That is why it is so strange you are a coal miner, it just does not appear right for you, anyhow.' Who are you? A time traveler he said. I am not your dad, yet I know him and this family line well. Let us just say where we are related, and I can never have a loving partnership with you.

He knew his body divided itself into hotness plus an understanding of her lust, a softness, and a weakness, a trembling including a not trembling, the two moieties

crushing one upon the other. Wrong yet right.

'You'd better run on to your profession,' she said. And she ran off and left him standing there in the sunshine. I need to see where I am going to be sleeping tonight anyway, and if I will have the money to say where I was at. Only after a long time did he move.

Plus, then, very gradually, as he walked, he dipped his head back in the rain that sprang up yet again, for just a few seconds and opened his lips... The Mechanical Cat rested but did not nap, existed but did not live in its gently whispering, softly fluctuating, softly

ornamented enclosure behind in a dark corner of the apartment.

These faint glimmers of one in the aurora, the moonlight from the expansive atmosphere composed for the great windowpane, stirred here and beyond on the alloy and some copper and the iron of the faintly quivering creature.

Each radiance shone on pieces of ruby glass including on fine-tuned slender hairs in the fiber whisked noses of the creation that shuddered mildly, its legs spread under it on rubber-padded paws. Bud touched the cat... she growled. Bud jumped back.

She rose in its enclosure and gazed at him with green-blue neon light glittering in its abruptly aroused eyeballs.

It grumbled repeatedly, a strange harsh sequence of electrical hissing, a frying din, a scraping of alloy, a turning of gears that seemed worn and old-fashioned including mistrust. 'Neither, no, girl,' said Bud, his heart pounding- at the thing. He observed the silvery awl extended against the air an inch, pull back, stretch, pull back.

Bud pushed down the alloy ramp up and down floors of his home. He went out to look at the city out the glass doors and the mist had been realized aside entirely, furthermore, he took a hit off his E-cigarette

and came back to bend down and look at the cat missing his wife.

It was like a numerous bee come homeward of some field anywhere the honey is full of poison wildness, of madness and horror, its trunk jammed with that over-rich nectar and presently it was sleeping the evil out of itself.

'Hi,' whispered Bud, excited as forever with the still beast, the existing beast. In the evening when things got sullen, which was every evening, the kids slide and play in the parks over the way with no care in the world and I would think of my childhood, including established the ticking combinations of the olfactory system of the cat and let loose rats in the dwelling I

call home behind me, and sometimes fowls, and sometimes dogs that would have to be asphyxiated anyway, and burning buildings- blocks away.

Nevertheless, there would be betting to see which cat would clinch first. The creatures were turned loose- to run in packs in the streets, on the lowest leaves of the grounds with the low life- were trash and lost cars of the past are- on Earth first levels- and past roads that endured dialect.

Three moments later the game was done, the rat, cat, or chicken caught half across the areaway, seized in gentling paws while a four-inch arched steel syringe fell from the proboscis of the cat to introduce massive jolts of morphine or procaine. The

cat's-paw remained then flung in the incinerator-or eaten by poverty. A new star famine game has begun- and I already knew what was going to be the leader of the pack. Bud stayed upstairs most evenings when this went on.

~*~

The girl- There should have remained a time a couple of years ago while she had bet with the best of them and lost a week's wages and faced her violent hatred towards the world and her parents, which manifested itself in veins and blemishes on her skin and arms.

Solely now at nightfall she rested in his berth, performance changed to the wall, monitoring to whoops of roaring below and

the piano-string hasten of rat feet below, the violin squeaking of rodents, moreover the fabulous shadowing- of creeps- looking for hits and quiet's- woman, and drugs-motioned silence of the things leaping out like a miller in the virgin light, finding, taking its victim, interpolating the needle, and going back to its den to depart as if a switch had stayed fixed.

The howl stewed in the creature, and it glanced at him- all the way down where it was. Bud stiffened up. The cat took a move from its enclosure. Bud grasped the glass handrail with one hand. The handrail, finding, thrust upward furthermore took him through the ceiling, quietly- to a new room.

He walked off in the moiety lit floor that would glow within the glass of the floor of the upper level. He was quivering and his face was extremely white.

Hereinafter, the impressions cat had settled back down upon its unbelievable mighty legs and was whispering to itself again, its multifaceted eyes at peace. Bud stood, engaging the fears, passing by the ramp.

Behind him, four men at a card table under a burgeoning mixed colored light in the corner glimpsed momentarily but said zero.

Only the man with the back hardhat plus the sign of the star- seraphim on his hat, at last, unusual, his playing cards in his

thin hand, talked across the long room. 'Bud...? ' 'It doesn't like me,' said Bud. 'What, the Cat?'

The other men studied his cards of knowing what was to come next. 'Come off it- the girl said don't do anything. It does not tell you anything other than what you want to believe is true. It just performs- a piece of mind.' It is like a lesson in ballistics. It has a trajectory we settle for. It follows through. It targets itself, places itself, and cuts off. It's only copper wire, storage batteries, and electricity.' Bud swallowed. 'It's just like computers can be set to any sequence, so many amino acids, so many Sulphur, so much butterfat, and alkaline.’

'Right?' 'We all comprehend that.' 'All of those chemical insights and discounts on all of us here in the residence are read in the control file downstairs. Of this new partnership.

It would be secure for someone to fasten up a partial sequence on the cat's 'consciousness,' a touch of amino acids. That would estimate what the creature did just now.

Reciprocated himself toward me.' 'Holy Hell,' 'Annoyed, though not angry. Just enough 'mindfulness' set up in it by someone, therefore, it crumbled- when I touched it.' 'I would not do a thing like that?'

The next day he runs into the same young girl. All the same questions- all the same things said, 'you haven't any enemies here, yet.' 'None that I know of.'

'We'll have the cat checked by our specialists tomorrow.

'This isn't the first time it's warned me,' said Bud.

'Last month it happened twice.' 'We'll fix it up. Don't worry' But Bud did not move and only stood believing of the air-conditioner grille in the hall at home and what lay hidden behind the grille.

If someone here in the home identified the vent then might not, they 'perceive' the cat...? The girlfriend came

over to the glass ramp and gave Bud a questioning glimpse. 'I was just guessing,' said Bud, 'what does the kitty think about down there nights? Is it coming alive on us? It makes me shiver.'

'It doesn't believe anything we don't want it to imagine.' 'That's sad,' said Bud, quietly, 'because only we put into it is seeking, obtaining, and destroying. What a disgrace if that is all it can ever comprehend.' Kasandra, she breathed lightly. 'Hell! It's a little bit of artisanship, a reliable rifle that the container fetches its purpose and ensures the bull's-eye every time.'

'That's why,' said Bud. 'I wouldn't need to be its next prey. 'Why? You got a

guilty moral about something?' Bud glimpsed up quickly. Kasandra stood there gazing at him steadily with his eyes, while his jaw cracked and began to laugh, softly.

One two three four five six seven days- all the same. Plus, as many times he came out of the dwelling and his woman was there somewhere in the memory only nagging or wanting him for something.

Once he saw her squatting peeing next to a hickory tree like a dog and not caring what others thought, once he saw her sitting on the lawn naked knitting a sweater, three or four times he found a perfume of late flowers on his porch, or a handful of chestnuts in a little sack- all from the girl, or some fall leaves easily bound to a

sheet of white paper and thumb- tacked to his door- safe to say she was a little mad. ‘Maybe she is crazy, he questioned.’

Every day the girl walked him to the corner- asking for his love. They marched still further, and the girl said, 'Is it accurate that long-ago firefighters put fires out instead of going to start them?' 'Negative- Dwellings have always been fire-resistant, take my account of this.' 'Strange is it not?' 'I discovered already that a considerable time past residence used to burn by misfortune, and they needed a ladder man to stop the flames with trucks you had to drive.' He chuckled, yet this is so-o. She peeped over. 'Why are you giggling?' 'I love

how dumb they have made you all!' 'I don't understand.' 'Living in the past.' He spoke.

He began to giggle repeatedly and held- 'Why?' 'You grin if I haven't done entertaining things and you respond right off. You never quit thinking about what I've asked you.'

He finished walking, 'You are a unique one,' he said, gazing at her. 'Haven't you any honor?' 'I don't anticipate being insulted. It's just, I love to watch characters too much, I suppose.'

'Well, doesn't this suggest anything to you?' He rapped the digits sewed on his chair-stained sleeve. 'Aye,' she murmured. She doubled her step. 'Become you eternally

observed the jet automobiles racing on the avenues above and below.

'You're developing the topic!' 'I seldom think drivers don't know what lawns are, or flowers because they nevermore see them casually,' she said.

'That's a rose-garden! White blurs are houses. Brown blurs are heifers. If you conferred a driver a flourishing blur, oh yes! he would say, that's lawn! A pink blur? My uncle drove slowly on a highway once. Isn't that funny, and sad, too?' 'You think too many things,' uneasily you are just like Elody. She knocked on some oranges that had fallen off the tree in the front courtyard. 'Or talking about how strange the world is- to how it was, and we have no

understanding as if it never were anything other than we know now.

Being with people is nice. Although- I do not think it is social to get a bunch of people collectively and then not let them communicate, do you? Then an hour of basketball or baseball or running an hour of TV schooling class in front of the smart wall.

Then yet the extra hour of transcription history or painting pictures with more depth I have ever seen in real life, and more sports, simply do you know, we never ask inquiries, or at least most do not; they just run the results at you, bing, bing, bing, and us sitting there for four more hours of web professor.

(Back)

1

(Living life on repeat- just in a new body. Back to destiny.)

3001- When I woke up it was cold like the haunting type of day with low light and the feeling of fog. The other side of the bed in her rent room that was 3-foot-high and 7-foot-long is cold like me inside and this world that I live in. Her fingers spring out, and then tighten, seeking Elody tempers, and, finding only the rough canvas cover of the mattress, I am there by her side she is afraid that she is going to be the one, the one that is chosen to combat.

'It was a yearning to burn.' Computers and robots have taken over the world, nobody needs to read any of that shit,

or think. Everything is at our fingertips with cell phones, I pad,’ and PCs, without looking through old dusty pages, plus its agents the law to think for yourself, and read any books. We burn books like most have the burning itch to have unprotected sex.'

Like me she was thinking about how she might be the one girl in our town that has to give her freedom to fight in this war, like all of us girls in our bunker, a girl school if you well, we all are having this bad dream all the same dream how does that work? No mom or dad’s no boys, so not cool for a girl that is a pre-teen yet wants to feel what love is- we were all ripped away for how we are the girls with the stars in our arms and known by a number.

Unquestionably, she did- thinking she would be the one called out to do this task, yet so did I- like so did all of us. This is the day of the acquisition of being a woman of my type, a girl that is not what is called the right race.

Were we having to go down in our numbers of what is not permitted to the troopers want and that man that has power over us all?

She pulls the covers back over and I am now in the same bed with her not allowed yet she is my little sister… what are they going to do, drag me out of the room and put a gun in my hand and kill me like they did my other older sister, last night? Just kill me, and get it over with… so I said,

I live in a room with 100 girls, where you can even shit without a man or them looking at you are doing just that. Sleeping with one open, to say the least… I have to say what I say now, or… (You are not prompted to say what go one within the walls.)

The voice in the air said. I fear they could kill me for that also! I want to see hare for the last time before we are off… before the round is chosen. I am here to see the look in her eyes of bloody fear, as she is me… we all feel this way… for the next day. She hugs me knowing that it is safe.

I prop myself up on one elbow. There is enough light in the bedroom to see them. My little sister, Elody curled up on her little side she is no more they four feet,

brown hair green eyes, sheltered under the privacy of the covers, nervous body and nightgown were there that was all we had on all that is allowed at night, short and loose-fitting.

The left side of her face forced my chest, some of it showing yet I did not care, you stop caring about that with a girl doing what she does next to us, you are going to die anyway, why not have your fantasy lover in your head.

Hugged tighter- and tighter together, before don where we are going to be ripped apart for what we may not know- being forever. She is now asleep, not me- she looks like me- Likewise, younger, the brown hair is what they odium about she

and I. Look at us worn Likewise, not so beaten- down, me more than her… for I am older, I think. My sister's face is as rosé as raindrops fall hard out the windows with the bars being all the keeps the cold out, as lovely as my sister- rose- for which she was named- on a day like this when she was born.

My mother was incredibly beautiful once, too. Or so they tell me… (You can say that I hear the voice say out yet this time it was in my mind, they have found a way to do that too.)

2

She wakes up to go pee, and they would not let her so she goes off on the floor by the bed, she could be killed for that… I

say she is going to go… you can stop her. Now she is sitting on her knees, yet I am guarding her like I am the world to her and the other way around. Pulverized-in muzzle up faces her lips like touching mine her nose on mine, wimping in her ear I was saying- words that would help or so I thought- missing was her mom- someone that was killed in front of her eyes seven days years ago, eyes color faded like when you lose a life and pass on, she had that feeling I am sure of that fact.

She was talking about being a kid, and what that was like before all this bull shit happened. Elody named her Punches, maintaining that she black, brown, and white like a coat that I have that is full of

holes, she was bright and blooming like a bright flower in spring at home, in France.

That cat dislikes me, yet I do not mind her, or at least distrusts me, that something I have felt a lot in my life, not being liked. Unlike my sister, even though it was years ago, he still remembers how I tried to drown her in a pot for something to eat. We were that unfortunate thing to the troopers, that took all that we were and were away from us.

And even then, my sister still loved me- she knew I was doing what I had to. I recall when she brought him home, as a pet and not something that was food on the table- hell we did not even have that… Just a

kitten, belly puffy with maggots, crawling with fleas.

The last thing I needed was another mouth to feed. Likewise, Elody begged so hard, cried even, I had to let him stay. It turned out okay, even the maggot off cats… and so well she- I have even eaten the occasional rat run up my leg in my bed- raw.

Sometimes, when I clean a kill, I feed Likewise, Teacup the entrails. He stopped hissing at me. The hair on my legs keeps us girl worms- looks good now to be all hair. No hissing… I bit you back and did not even think about it… I loved cats, Likewise, food is food. I feel one day, I will come upon a loved one of mine motionless against a wall or lying in the Grazing land,

you hear the wails from a house, and the X armed forces are called in to repossess the body. Malnourishment is never the cause of death officially. It is always the flu, or exposure, or pneumonia.

Likewise, then again that fools no one…

Starvation Is not particularly rare of fate in these parts of 14. Who has not seen the dupes? Older people who cannot work. Children from a family with too many to feed. Those injured in the mines are left in the mud outside the shaft to pass on. Struggling through the streets ends with warfare.

3

This is the gigantic chamber we will ever come to love, for the love of death is less painful than living in the camp. I swing my legs off the bed reaching for my issued boots. Lithe leather that has molded to my feet. I pull on trousers, a dress, tuck my hair up and out, my long 2 drown braid down my chest, and grab my silage bag. I was asked to do what I must do so we lasted until we were called out- I think back on days that pass- On the table before it was blown up- under a wooden bowl to protect it from hungry rats and cats alike, sits a perfect little rabbit shit ball wrapped in rosemary leaves.

Elody gift to me on earning a day. I put the cheese carefully in my pocket as I

slipped outside, that was on the rat tarp hoping not to snap it down on my middle finger, and I need that as a girl- you know.

4

My father had been killed in the mine accident three months earlier in the bitterest February anyone could remember this if they wanted- Likewise, they do not care. The numbness of his loss had passed, and the pain would hit me out of nowhere, photocopying me over, racking my body with sobs. Where are you? I would cry out in my mind all the time- it was harder for her being so young. My mom was lost in space for days after… not saying anything to anyone… or us so Elody and I were taking care of ourselves. When all she did was lay

in bed with vibrations pulsating going on, her thoughts they said were with him.

The community had given us a small amount of money as compensation for his death, enough to cover one month of grieving at which time my mother would be expected to get a job. Only she did not.

She did not do anything Likewise, sitting propped up in a chair or, more often, huddled under the blankets on her bed, eyes fixed on some point in the distance. Occasionally, she would stir, get up as if moved by some urgent purpose, only to then collapse back into stillness. No amount of pleading from My sister seemed to affect her.

Our part of region 14, nicknamed the purlieu, is usually crawling with coal miners heading out to the morning shift at this hour. People with bent over shoulders, swollen knuckles, and skinned backs and knees, many who have long since stopped trying to scrub the coal dust out of their broken nails, the lines of their sunken faces.

Nonetheless today the gloomy streets are empty and barren. Shutters are a brown window, row homes on the squat, and now graying color houses closed shop underneath. The earning of who is chosen are not until five P.M. May as well sleep on the only day now being here where we were allowed to do as we wanted, a reward they

called for knowing that we are brave enough today for our area.

Mom is only nineteen… just so you know, we all have kids young… for some man take us as there's. It is just how it works here. I have already had. Yet my dad killed him for this… there is no law saying you can or cannot.

5

Our house is at the edge of the Ridge. I only must pass a few towns to reach the unkempt field called the Grazing Lands. Separating the Grazing land from the woods that are all burnt for the warfare, in fact circling all of quarter 14, is a high wood cladding fence topped with barbed-wire loops. In theory, it is supposed to be

electrified twenty-four hours with which man on towers, train dropping off more girls, girls-only here and man that wants us to be dead, a day as a deterrent to the predators that live in the woods- packs of wild dogs want to lick and bit at are hills- streets are like infertile.

Even so, I always take a moment to listen carefully for the hum that means the fence is live, I sometimes try to see the boy's side, over there if I can, some of us girls try to run the face, there are ways. Right now, it is silent as a stone and some of us went for it, all we could do is be killed- so what- I do not want to die a virgin. Hidden by a clump of bushes, we dash, I flatten out on

my belly and slide under a two-foot stretch that has been loose by the time before.

There are several other weak spots in the fence that have been penetrated. Likewise, this one is so close, out of the bathroom showers where the girls made a way out, I always enter the woods here, not caring if I have anything on or not.

6

We girls clam trees, to see if we can see into the boys' rooms, and then they give us a wavy saying it all clear and we make the run for it, sometimes- I feel like why they risk their lives for us- just once, a girl just needs it in more.

I reclaim a bow, which I have made to fight them off me, I had it headed, so if I take on fire, I have something to send back, behind a hollow log we wait it out. The Electrified fence in the way or not we were getting there and getting a boy tonight- it was the last time we might, the fence has been up-and-coming at keeping the carnivores out of quarters of 14.

Inside the timbers, they roam freely, and there are added concerns like venomous snakes, rabid animals, and no real paths to follow for deer and bear. The boys also give us the thing we need other than love at night- food is an important thing for where we are as thin as could be.

Good, my sister had to suck on my nipple just for something to eat… that's how sad things are here… were not allowed to have a baby, mine killed the day I came here when I was kicked in the gut, saying we do not need any more of your kind. It was for nine months.

Look at that place over there- like Eblock no running water just a trickle, out of a hand pump no lights- nothing Likewise, your thoughts of the girls on the other side, and betting it is their life, and working as slaves for the troopers. Then again there's also food if you know how to find it.

My father knew this was all going to happen, I recall them rushing in, we were in the addict with a trap door, I flashback

about how he taught me some before he was blown to bits by a pistol go at his head in a bang. There was nothing even to bury. I was eleven then and still am. Five years later, I still woke up screaming for him to run.

So- my sister is ten, I worry if a ten-year-old could fight till death in this war as a young girl, and then I look at me and know; I am not as strong. I keep having a feeling that she or I would be called out and I do not know why- like, it is my destiny- to be the- chosen one.

7

Even though trespassing in the woods is illegal and I could be slaughtered and eaten for it I do not care, and poaching carries the severest of consequences, more

people would jeopardize it if they had weapons.

Nonetheless, most are not bold enough to venture out with just a homemade knife, I made mine for a food tray the tray they give you only once a day with roadkill on it. The water they give is the color of piss… some say they would eat their shit- I would not go that far, Likewise, crazy will get to you.

My bow is an infrequency as I go under the wall, tagged along with a few other body parts- few others keep well hidden in the woods as I am the first to make the running leaps over all the traps and snags, carefully wrapped in waterproof covers. Only 10 of us girls made this run,

there were so many that just stayed in the spacious room and played with themselves- why? You are going to die anyway.

Why? Why- not make this last run for food and sex and a way out of this all. If a boy can buy you out in a mirage. My father could have made good money selling us to a man or husband, yet it is common for us girls to be a tramp at our age if mommy and daddy have the bucks to do it. No gold band just someone that takes you for a possession… something to beat on and beat off on, they are playing things… I feel.

On the other hand, if the troopers found out I was doing this like all these girls, like Alijah, Jania, Samee, Martah, Trace, and Majia- and so on… the other four

I hardly know other- then seeing the nude in their bad and the shower rooms, or eating their rations next to me… I would have been publicly executed for rabble-rousing at this point I feel too; I am the girl here with gut or so the others say.

My sister is the shy one of us all not even gone through the woman change is not bleeding if you do not get that, I just started like a week ago- that would not even kill a cockroach to eat it, I had to do that for her too, yet she is young sweet and innocent.

Most of the armed forces ignore the few of us who are hunting to give to them or the whole group, for this is what they want, us to fight for it so they do not have to kill, so they can kill us for doing what they want.

Confusing? Nope- not to them…

Because they are as hungry for fresh meat as anybody else is where what they want and what we want is not another human life to be killed yet they do. They are among our best trades- us- killing for the hell of it like a sick twisted sport- see the mass graves and the body braining like all the books. Then the idea that someone might be arming the ridge would never have been allowed.

All that was wisdom was dejected and seen as not to be useful in our lives, it has been a band. There are a lot of things that are forbidden to me, yet that does not stop me from doing it anyway- unlike my reluctant sister that fears everything and everybody.

8

In the fall, a few brave souls sneak into the woods to harvest apples from us girl climbing trees. Nevertheless- always in sight of the Grazing land with the eyes of at least one trooper looking up at the dress, you get what I am saying there, never not there. Always close enough to run back to the safety of neighborhood 14 if distress arises. 'Areas of fourteen.' Where you can starve to death in safety,' I mumble out yet I was the only one to hear or so I thought when the girl next to me was rolling her eyes. Then I glanced over my shoulder, and she was like up my Likewise, even here, even in the middle of nowhere, you worry someone might overhear you, she said not

wanting me to say a word. The number on her jacket (G- S- 08976457544) was shining now in the spotlight of the guards' tower, we are going to get in trouble, she said, as we were crawling to the boys' room. G for girl S for the star and the number ID.

Where are the star girls… that is what they all call us here?

I think they were all out. I hear the click of the guns, it is just target practice for them just a hunt, they want us to do this!

9

When I was younger, I scared my mother to death that I would look out for my sister, the things I would blurt out about Area 14, about the people who rule our

country, Paris was overrun and now there are 15 parts, from the remote city called the Capital up to us the little unsolicited parts.

Eventually, I understood this would only lead us to more trouble, doing this so we went in and out fast with more than just a kiss- I had my I on Blazie, I was going to have this one thing- before I was axed off with my head. So-o I learned to hold my tongue and to turn my features into an indifferent mask so that no one could ever read my thoughts. On the other hand, unlike my sister, I do say way too much.

(Back)

Doing my work quietly in school was my life before this place and being ripped out of reality. Make only polite small talk in

the public market that was my sister-, not me. You can see us all there in this one-room schoolhouse. She is the good girl, not me- I deliberate little more than the trade in the hot plate at my desk, the bell rings out free to go- to the market where I make most of my money giving up my food for the day.

Even at home there is nothing, I have on a long white T-shirt ripped up showing all my one side that was dads, that I wear as my dress, where I am less pleasant, I avoid discussing tricky topics. Like the reaping, or food shortages, or the war kill. Elody might begin to repeat my words, she looks up to me for everything, where would she be without me behind her? They know this they all do…

I wear this all the time even in the rain, where you can see it all, yet no one care about, that when all they want to do is live on another day sex is not something we care about when kids are run around naked- like a tribe around a fire wild looking like revenues animals with a look in their eyes for the test of blood.

10

The boy and the sight of him waiting there brings a smile to my face until he is shot right in front of me and all of us girls run back to are badly scared, and in far that we were seen, some girl is still doing their thing… They ask questions, looking at white looks on our faces, one looked at me I said I never smile except when I see him

know I will never- I was in love with that boy. It is not like I wanted to be held or anything Likewise, she could attest took her hand off it to feel my pain.

No, her boy was in her hand only- that what I will have to do now- hers was killed off the night before. Killing is the sport they love, and I hate it!

My real name is Emalie, Likewise, that is not what I remember as just a number is all; I had barely whispered it and they say you are only allowed to give out your number to outsiders. So-o I thought what they going to kill me for this little thing I think not- so.

(Back)

On the hunt- 'Look what I shot, I said to my sister too young to have a gun-' she holds up a loaf of bread with the burl stuck in it, and I laugh hard. It is real bakery bread; how did she get that? Not the flat, dense loaves we make from our grain provisions.

She never said how she got it, yet I had my thoughts about it, as a boy gave it to her, which made it to her bedside… at home. I take it in my hands, and we share it, pull it to bits, and hold the wound in the crust to my nose, inhaling the fragrance that makes my mouth flood with drool. Fine bread like this is for special junctures. The boys have more for they are boy’s worth something, unlike girls that have no value

other than that of passing on this race they do not want.

'Mum, still warm,' I say. She must have been at the bakery at dawn with some run-away boy to trade for it, she gives him a kiss and a huge body, and her body will do whatever she wants. For that is all girls are good for in these municipalities- 'What did it cost you?' I asked- Just a kiss good night. I giggle, I think sure- I know- yet it was food, right?

'Well, we all feel a little closer today, don't we as we all look at the family for what may be the last time?' I say fast, not even bothering to roll my eyes. 'Elody left us a slice of cheese on the traps saying this as a joke.' I pulled it out. 'We also

shared a cuddly squirrel- I got the ass. Think the old man was feeling sentimental this morning,' says that he would stay with us and not work for the day- there are just sealing shafts off- no money in that for them to take so why did it he felt.

'Even wished me luck.' I look at the blue star glowing etched into my skin on my arm. Like the Blue Bird nickels, that I will certainly not- interminably give up.

11

Her expression brightens at the treat as I hug her for what I thought the last time. 'Thank you,' I said to her for being in my life. We'll have a real feast more before we are either executed in a line or have to

fight for life as the chosen girls to keep our race going- they did as some not all.'

There we all are all ganged up in rows, like little toy soldiers we fall in these lines it was what was said for us to do in our thinking, as we all march into a Capitol agent our well or life, accent as she mimics

Effie Trinket, the maniacally upbeat woman who arrives once a year to read out the names at the jumping.

'I almost disremembered! Blissful Starvation Stars!'

Her determination led to a few blueberries from the bushes around us.

'Besides- May you yearn for the balances of life always be in your

erranding.' The confetti go- off… as we await our fate, yet she the right bitch we will live on for the rest of her days, yet we with the state may not… just for being not… what they want us to be… who are they? The backs were all murder in front of us, so we could see what be in this battle coming up. They are not good enough to scrub the fools' troopers say giggling amongst themselves. There is one to ack girl and one black boy fight in this upcoming event. They want less… us too…

The sweet from fingers going down my hand's sourness detonates across my tongue.' I no-win situation it in my mouth, as well as break the delicate skin with my teeth biting my nails. May you yearn for the

balances of life always be in your erranding!'

I arrived in my mind like we all are made to think what must be- with equal verve… we must put on it because the unconventional is to be scared out of your intelligence. As well, the Capitol pronunciation is so la-di-da, anything sounds funny in it, and I look for her and see her knees are even knocking as she looks frightened. Like a lost little girl on her way to school in the dark morning woods.

I watch as the woman we call Miss.

Lorde Dio pulls names with her hand.

Straight black hair, olive skin, gray eyes she is the head of the girls or so were tooled.

Likewise, we are not related any- of the star girls are the mix of them that is why we are being killed, burnt, and gassed, at least not closely. It was at that moment of the families were never to be also, once again, we are living in an area yarning would change for their wants, for those that worked would go on without their kids, like my dad who works the mines resemble one another this way. Were one, if not both of his offspring would die in this event?

That is why my mother and Elody, with their light hair, braided and have bright haunting spooky-looking blue eyes,

always look out of place in all the others, not something common. They are… amazing to me… My mother's parents were part of the small Kidd's class that outfits troopers. X armed forces, and the occasional Ridge purchaser. They ran an apothecary shop in the nicer part of Area 14. Since almost no one can afford doctors or an RN, apothecaries are our healers or crunch heelers. My father got to know my mother, for they were in the same group. She was not all X you see; she was upper in her class for part 2.

She was banished from her mom and dad doing this and having kids not married. She is like one present of us- comparable to what is in his bloodline. She

must have loved him leaving her home for the Ridge. Because on her hunts she would occasionally collect medicinal herbs, Elody is good with her hands, even the boys say that when we were all together living free, to a point, and selling those to her shop to be brewed into medications.

All she ever wanted was a lover and she has even taught me what was in her romantic dreams, like walking through them, with her, their race. Loads of kissing, fleshly playing, and lusting! I never had anything like that… thus far I want to. I try to evoke that when all I can see is the lady who sat by, blank and out-of-the-way, while her children turned to the skin, bones, and rot. I try to excuse her for my father's

wishes. Nevertheless, to be truthful, I am not the merciful type, like my sister.

My sister’s day in the days before this- bathing in a tub of warm water waits for me. and I scrub off her off all the dirt, water hard to find so I would have to be in there with her, and to get all the sweat from the woods of all with all the grim, and even wash my hair and her which only happens once a week. Let us put your hair up, too,' she says. I let her towel-dry it and two braids up around her head back into a ponytail. I can hardly recognize myself in the cracked mirror that leans against the wall. To my surprise, my mother has laid out one of her lovely sundresses for me and one for her with soft pink matching shoes- new

there were days where we did not have anything on our feet.

Plus, that was the same day they kicked down the doors and said- we belong to them. You look beautiful, she was not a little girl with this look. And nothing like myself,' I say. I hug her because I know these next few hours will be terrible for her.

Her first reaping. She is about as safe as you can get since, she has only entered once. I would not let her take out any tesserae. Likewise, she is worried about me. That the unthinkable might happen. I protect Elody in every way I can, she knows that, Likewise, then I am immobilized against the earnings. The tormented I always feel when she is in pain or fearful,

she balls up lags to her chest, and threatens to register the bad thoughts.

12

Nocked like in the rocks up and over.

Starting this place, we are invisible. Likewise, we have a clear view of the valley over to the tower, which is teeming with summer life even if we were regulated. The girl in summer was soaking sunlight dance in the streets with Fire Higdon’s blasting water.

The day’s war was glorious before all hell was unleashed on my mind, with a blue sky like my sister’s eyes and a soft breeze like her hair tickling my face.

There had never been anything romantic between her and a boy until this last week, unlike me. And although he was only two years older, so I feel like it was harmless for what I would and she would get out of it, he already looked like a man strong in all the places. It took a long time for us to even become friends, not for her she was swooning fast, to stop haggling over every trade and begin helping each other out.

When they produced a more efficient system that transported coal directly from the mines to the trains, we got on to go to this place up at the capital.

Were up to now- where it is- tonight. After the earnings, where everyone

is supposed to celebrate and love to hate and love to die with fate. Like a lot of people do, out of relief that their children have been spared for another year. Likewise, at least two families will pull their shutters, lock their doors, and try to figure out how they will survive the painful weeks to come.

13

At six o'clock, we head for the quadrangular. Your presence is mandatory except you are at death's back door. This evening, officials will come around and check to see if this is the case. If not, you will be imprisoned. People file in silently and sign in and go to their seats. The earning is an awesome occasion for the

Capitol to track the population as well. Seven- through pre-

teen year-olds are herded into roped areas marked off by ages, the oldest in the back, the young ones, like Elody, toward the front.

Dad and mothers- and teens or family members line up around the boundary where they have to say or be shot on the spot and some are and there are cheers, holding tightly to one another's hands.

Likewise, there are others, too, who have no one they love at stake, or who no longer care, who slip among the crowd, taking bets on the two kids whose names will be drawn. Balances are given on their

ages. We have too many we need to out the overloads, we are tipping the scales- if you know, the movie plays out about the story of how this all came to be…

These same people tend to be informers, and who has not broken the commandment laws? I could be shot daily for hunting, Likewise, the appetites of those in charge protect me. Not everyone can claim the same. Whether they are Ridge or merchant if they will break down and weep. Most refuse to deal with the racketeers Likewise, carefully, prudently. The pre-teen that is here is the one that has already done this and lives to talk about it, yet that does not stop them from killing you if you fight them also.

The four commandments of stars pre-teens:

A star person may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm unless it is given the order.

A star person must obey orders given by human trooper’s beings excluding orders that would conflict with the First Law.

A Star person must protect his or her existence if such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

No sex of any nature or style is identified in the populations with same sex without given rights to pass on your race.

Yet in this tournament, all laws are off!

That is what makes this so much fun- no- Miss Lorde Dio said, sipping on her mixed drink.

As we walked, I noticed Elody's blouse had pulled out of her skirt in the back again and forced myself to stay calm. 'Tuck your tail in, little girl to you looks cute and all grown up,' I say, smoothing the blouse back in place. I glance overall at their whole school uniforms all unique to their parts in this parcel, yet the same with their likewise, tons on the one side how we all must be equal, still smoldering underneath his stony expression. Sitting next to each other at assemblies, partnering

for sports activities. We rarely chat, which suits- some just like us both simply fine to me if you are or not- you must give it to get it- no? The girl is calling out once she is in my year at school. Being the mayor's daughter of all things- no one is excluded if you have some star in you, you expect her to be a snob, Likewise, she is all right. She just keeps to herself. Like me. Yet she may have the cone to get her replaced with someone like me.

Elody, this calling of all nights- her drab school outfit has been replaced by an expensive white dress, where the girl all must strip in front of us boy’s girls everyone sees this, seeing these girls all become what they are going to be when they change.

Then her dark hair is done up with a pink ribbon by an older girl that had sieved the last war stars. Reaping clothes of per white shows innocents- you have to tournament your colors and your place in this world. The boy forms the head down shaved… and made flawless… they say it the only time a race would look worthy.

I read into my sister's thoughts- she was thinking about her boy- Does she mean it? I question- know they were hearing this too when a thought like this was not permitted. Or is she messing with him, for love and lust? I am guessing the second. The Capitol arena looks like the warrior playground in Roman times just art-deco-

white glassy and modern, yet it is the 2040’s.

His eyes landed small on her. I saw the puppy love, circular pin at her before she took a foot in her dress. Real silver Likewise, tons and add-ons… Attractively crafted. 'What can you have other than your thoughts at this point when all you are in front of all of them, sure you’re going to think? Five entries? The interplanetary gets tighter, more enclosed as individuals reach. The square's quite large, Likewise, not enough to hold Area 14th populace of about ten thousand.

Stragglers are directed to the adjacent streets, where they can watch the event on screen as it is televised live by the

state. I had six when I was just twelve years old.'

Her face became closed off and it looked drop like her eyes in shame when she was not a woman there was nothing to take off the people giggled saying she was still a baby. The bets are on her is she is picked- that she would die fast, boys put the money on her to not last, just like they did with me, and a girl named Illiah 'Good fortune, I hear from the girl next to me- she said my this be in your erranding's.' 'You, too,' I say, and the door closes and the light changes from intensely when our nude bodies change to blue now. Showing is the color of whom we are… and the color we are going to die for.

The rules of the Starvation Stars are simple. In chastisement for the revolt, each of the 15 districts must provide one girl and one boy, called Likewise, to participate. The twenty-four try- Likewise, will be imprisoned in a vast outdoor arena that could hold anything from a burning desert to a frozen wasteland. Over several weeks, the competitors must fight to the death. On the last try Likewise, standing wins.

14

The result was France, a shining Capitol ringed by thirteen districts, which brought peace and prosperity to its citizens. Then came the dim days, the revolting of the neighborhoods in contradiction of the Capitol and their principal.

15 were defeated for this out of all of us, yet this a yearly thing the other is just knocked off my well of the powers at be, the thirteenth obliterated. The Treaty of Treason gave us the new laws to guarantee peace and, as our yearly reminder, that the Dark

Days must never be repeated; it gave us the Starvation Stars. I ask why not just kill us all and be done with it, they say what is the fun in not seeing the pain and famine for life. Taking the kids from our districts, forcing them to kill one another while having no say at all.

This is the Capitol's way of reminding us how we are at their sympathy and lack of it. How little unplanned we

would stand to endure another revolt. To make it embarrass- as well as torturous, the Capitol requires us to treat the Starvation Stars as entertainment, a sporting event pitting every community against the others. The last honored guy alive receives a life of ease back home, and their community will be showered with awards and the right to pass on his spermatozoa and pop as many kids as he wanted with whatever preteen girl he wanted, consisting of food. All year, the Capitol will show the winning community gifts of grain and oil and even delicacies like sugar while the rest of us battle starvation.

The mayor steps up to the platform and begins delivering… It is the same story

every year. He tells of the history of us and is part of France, the country that rose out of the ashes of and blood where every inch is covered. She lists the disasters, the droughts, the storms, the fires, the violating seas that swallowed up so much of the land, the brutal war for what little sustenance lingered. 'Look how they take our children away and demean them like this naked, and afraid, they kill off babies like changing underwear, if there are twins one is killed off, and sacrifice them and there's nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every one of you. Just as we did in Community Thirteen.'

Then she reads the list of past Neighborhood 14 victors. In 200 years, we

have had exactly three. Only one is still alive and he stands before us two years back. A paunchy, young man -aged man, never a girl, that is the win for the girls this year to kick ass. A girl doing this they say is impossible. So…? What would you say as a girl? Are we that week and worthless? The crowd responds with its token applause. Likewise, he is confused and tries to give Effie Trinket a big hug, which she barely manages to fend off. Them- whatsoever words they use, the real message is clear: we want to see you fight till death for us to see if you want to live on and pass your blood down, yet you will have to lose some. 'Look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there's nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every

one of you. Just as we did in Neighborhood Thirteen.'

It is time for the drawing. Effie Trinket without the help of a hand- says as she always does, 'Females first!' and crosses to the goblet note with the girls' names. She goes on a bit about what an honor it is to be here, while all and sundry knows she is just aching to get bumped up to a better community where they have proper victors, not drunks who molest you in front of the entire nation.' Likewise, - then again there are still thousands of slips in here we see the name bingeing up on the wraparound walls,' I wish I could whisper to her not to think- yet that is not easy to do.

Through the crowd, I spot her looking back at me with a ghost of a smile. She reaches in, digs her hand deep into the note, and pulls out a slip of paper. The crowd draws in a collective breath and then you can hear a pin drop, and I am feeling nauseous and so desperately hoping that it is not me, that it is not me, that it is not me. As earnings go, this one at least has a slight entertainment factor. Likewise, suddenly I am thinking of her all the names 100 in that big glass droplet and how the balances are in your surroundings. Not compared to a lot of boys.

And he is thinking the same thing about me because her face darkens, and she turns away.

Like it was already said-

15

Someone was gripping my arm, a boy from Sam, and I started to fall, and he caught me. Now I feel her berth in me like, like when I feel hard going down the steps trying to remember how to breathe, when I hit a window on wet concrete into and on a home and concerned back, unable to speak, totally stunned as the name bounces around the inside of my cranium.

And then I see her, the blood drained from her face, hands clenched in fists at her sides, walking with stiff, small steps up toward the stage, passing me, and I see the back of her blouse has become untucked and hangs out over her skirt.

Somewhere far away, I can hear the crowd murmuring unhappily as they always do when a twelve-year-old gets chosen because no one thinks this is fair. It is this detail, the untucked blouse forming a ducktail, which brings me back to myself.

I screamed out Elody was one slip of paper in thousands! There must have been some mistake here there must be. I wanted to replace her, yet I could not. I would kill for doing that, that would have been rebelling and an act that would see death to you for doing. I said in the same moments, now I should not- this cannot be happening… Her chances of being chosen so remote to all of us yet the love the underdog and the weak meek girl to do this, the taste

of blood dripping down her vagina is what they want. And they are going to see that too, that I would not even bother to worry about her. I know she is going to pull through this not as innocent little girl Likewise, come back as a crampon lady. She will be deflowered just trying to stay alive with all the boys that she needs to give her what she needs and that is food and warmth and housing with them.

A girl is just not as strong as a boy that all say… Hadn't I done everything? On stage no- Elody was singled out for her age, and virginity- STRIP! NAKED! OR DIE! We all gasped, yet some said it has happened before to the country. Likewise, I see her pink and white kiddie undies moving down.

She is reluctant, yet must do this… I nor she does not have to worry about a boy popping vagina open, a topper already does it with his finger ripping fixed she cray and it bloods out saying we cannot have you be a little girl.

He licks the blood off his finger with his lips snickering, she will always be remembered for this… and I was the one to take her.

16

Anywhere far away would be nice sing this all happening, I can hear the crowd murmuring building up into an oh, happily as they always do when a ten-year-old girl gets deflowered in front of a crowd, gets preferred because no one thinks this is

reasonable. As well as then I see her, the blood drained from her hands, face tightened in fists at her sides, walking with stiff, small steps up toward the stage, passing me, and I see the back of her blouse has become untucked and hangs out over her skirt yet again I did not say anything about it in my mind for her to hear.

'Elody!' I do not need to shove through the crowd. The other kids make their way allowing me a straight path to the platform of the stage. I reach her just as she is about to mount the steps. With one sweep of my arm, I push her behind me.' Elody!' The strangled cry comes out of her throat, and I saw that her muscles begin to move again as I was giving her the stench, yet I

knew soon that would change with the shout me out and off for her mind and thoughts with a microchip in my arm the run to my mind using sound waves.

'Lovely!' says Effie Trinket. ' Likewise, then again I have faith that there's a small matter of familiarizing the acquiring winner… There is some confusion on the stage, as all her mind chatting devices are ripped out of her body. The rule is that once a try Likewise, the name has been pulled from the ball, another eligible boy if a boy's name has been read, or girl if a girl's name has been read, no one can move forward to take his or her place. In some districts, I feel this would not want to be so, yet that life here- in which winning the reaping is such a

great honor, people are eager to risk their lives, volunteering is complicated. Nonetheless, in Community 14, where the word byline is equal to the word corpse, volunteers are all Likewise, extinct.

Elody is ear-splitting shrieking boisterously in front of me. She runs off the stage, naked as the day she was born as her dress slips as she trips some. Not caring about anything other than me. She is wrapped in her skinny arms around me like a vice. 'No! No! You can't go home with me; you have to go and maybe have a chance at winning- you could do this you know- I believe in you- remember that!'

I swallow this hard… 'Elody, let go or they well… No-' I say harshly not wanting

to be that way, because this is disconcerting me, and I don't want to cry. When they televise the replay of the earnings tonight, every person will make note of my tears or, they marked as an easy target for the gun team. Acknowledging applause, I stand there unmoving while they take part in the boldest form of dissent they can manage. Silence. Which says we do not agree. We do not condone it. All of this is wrong.

A weakling. I will give no one that satisfaction. 'Let go!' I can feel someone pulling her from my back. I turn and see Gale has lifted My sister off the ground and she is thrashing in his arms. 'Up you go, girl,' I say, I hear the voice fighting off the crying to keep stable, and then she is

carried off toward the back as a door opens without a sound. I steel myself and climb the steps down to the hose with my mom's head in my chest panicking.

(Back)

Just like my father, Elody, who no one can help loving. Was the one that I say living out her life as a helper of others, not killing them, that is why she was chosen for this?

Then to some degree, unexpected things happen. At least, I do not suppose it because I do not think of area 14 as a place that cares about her. I have become someone precious to her and that was looking out for her, yet I cannot ever do that, in my heart I knew she was a goner.

Yet I would not let her feel that I have the options. It is an old and rarely used gesture of our area, sporadically seen at funerals. It means thanks, it means admiration, it means goodbye to someone you love. Now I am truly in danger of crying, I know this… she is yet to see her fight to the death, for she was picked. Not allowed yet there giggling at her for this… I knew she would be strong- surprisingly strong for such a wreck. 'Look at her…. Look at this one! They were saying she is just a baby! Easy meat!'

They bring them all back out after they all cool down… like an encore… All the names have been called out I could not even hear them like… it was not important.

All the boys and all the girls… they are all standing there all have their ways, and their personalities, yet none-stand out as much as she.

He cannot think of the word for a while- a man said- he releases me and starts for the front of the stage. He shouts, pointing directly into a camera. 'I like her!' His breath reeks of homemade whiskey, I have run for him, and it has been a long time since he was bathed. I know how to be a boot lager. Running at night only for it is illegal. Then he adds in the camera- 'Boldness I would bang her Likewise!' he says triumphantly. 'More than you any other girls up there or in this assembly, therefore

they picked here- she’s pretty! - and that makes us want to fight for her battle.'

'Lots in her dreaminess… he was…' He is disgusting. Likewise, I am grateful she was grossed out. Likewise, that was sweet even so… she was too nice… some said. They then did an up-close shot of her with her hands laced, her eyes dropped, chin tucked left, and wiggle- dancing with her arms V-ed inform of her hips to her shy ways. Camera gleefully trained and dropped to her eyes, and they got the upshot blue eyes glittering- lips wet to her peal face- cheeks shift pink, and she looked up with her eyes rolled to the top head down still.

She was biting her lip on the left side, looking like she was doing the pee-pee

dance like if she looked downward, it would all go away. I put my hands behind my back and stared into the distance and made a hand sign that only she would get so she would feel okay and safe. Eloy, the smallest of us all really- we asked where she came from, never growing in height since that age- she is 3 foot 8 inches- she is so small. Look five next to all these others that tower over her.

Even I tower over her at 5 feet.

17

Their numbers were clearer to me than their names…

All boys started with BS- something…

All the girls were G- S- something…

Long runs of numbers like a barcode…

Ezrah Everett- was the boy's name that was called out a boy that my sister played with for a lot of years before this all happen, yet we are getting used to this, it has been going on now for ages, it is just now we have a new evil like a leader that want massacres… it is not just since fight and die that was the old ways, now it is just pop anyone of she wishes just with a smile and bat of an eye- there died.

The boy Ezra- Oh, no she said- starting to think about him as a love interest- they read her thoughts I knew it I said, I think- this is sick- they want her to

lose her boy crush or see what could be. Not him… she yelled- I have never spoken directly to this boy. Likewise, I feel close to him for how he looked and held her to him- in play or not there was a spark there. I watch him as he makes his way toward the stage. 6 feet five inches in height, solid build, coal-black hair that falls in waves over his almost hitting the back of his nick all combed back not too long yet not short. Big brown eyes that change gold in the sunlight.

There were no odds here in the name draw- it was the thought of these kids- and what they did not want to see happen. Their worst nightmare- would be-and then they do it to be prominent. Kill your crush for example and if you do not someone is

going to. That the sport here- killing what you love. The shock of the moment is registering on his face was seeing her having the same look of hart hitting the floor and back up, you can see his struggle to remain emotionless with her loss in hope feeling as he had, Likewise, his brown eyes show the terror like I have seen so often in prey on the hunt for deer and others large or small tournament.

He is now a large tournament- a moving target- fun someone in the group does not just pop him off now- oh they cannot we all lost our gun to the government- Elody got hers back just for this event only. All the troopers in blood red, black, and gray uniforms- they use our shit

to kill us- nice right- helpless are we. Yet that was the overturn that took place.

Here is her uniform blue and white… that has chevrons on the font also there is her logo- and nameplate, and it shines in the light- which is a cobalt color that fades into navy blues. They have already made up… each uniform shows their colors, from their parts- unique to their towns. With a symbol that is all, there is too. Elody is the Blue Bird, with the guns crisscrossed in the back. So-o they knew there was no randomness here or so they want us to think- I am not that dumb- some are though.

A uniform with nothing underneath where if she takes the top off, she is topless,

no bras for to be far she does not need one- they find this funny too, for these things a ball of wool, and you cannot sleep in that way, so girls must run around in the nude, fun. It is all part of their sick tournament. Her hair will cover some yet not all over her chest… it is all that they want to see. I am sure we will see it all before the stars are over. And say if a boy can do this a girl can- farness they call it was all the same… also, there was her stuff needed- like them all-a medieval archery bows in pink with pink aero- feathers which she made and sets her apart from the others…

A Winchester gun also pinks, with a long white barrel sharp bayonet. All the old technology they said adds to guessing or

waiting for what was next when you are loading and someone is running upon you, yet she is the fastest girl I have ever seen to load a shot. She has a Gut hook hunting knife, to cut necks with our hands and more.

A civil war sword, with a handguard that's a plus on her end, says one boy cut his own hand off. I know not to shoot until I can smell their breath on my face, and not to fire until I see the color in their eyeballs. I am going to put this up to my heart and pull the trigger, I do not want too Likewise, I have too.

Her dad's gun was passed down and fit in a holster on her belt. Single barrel pinfire pistol AKA thumb gun.

Brass Knuckles if needed, and she will need them, a lot of this is a hand and kicking bloodbath. 100 areas and a purse with all the girl things she needs- like pads that all she wanted to be what they say is far to the other girls they made sure they all had the same, for others are crapping and she well to it is all part of the tournament for the girls on the fight- the time is in control of this too in her mind, and ammunition.

In this tournament, you can see a girl do it all- like we see everything about her life when she comes in OHs in the night before sleeping or in the morning- shits and pisses too. It is what makes it entertaining, they say. I am Elody- she sprays out six

times, for bath time. So, I wonder if she will, being shy? You are going to die anyway so why not… have some good feelings coming out of you… and so what- yet that is me not her… I am glued to the wall screens in my small one-room homespun that gave to us. It is smaller than a teardrop taller, yet they say this is better, all our old homes were bulldozed over with all our crap inside, yet we have a screen that links to the troops.

They do not have cameras in our bathrooms or bedrooms for this fact, yet I wonder this too- for they know how sexual Elody is with her own body, not public chat that she where kiddie undies, that she is pre-pubescent, that she does not have a bar yet. That she loves horses, and dolls, and

matching thin strap- colorful sundress, with her shoes, and fingernails. Doing her hair with soft waves and long brads, and playing outside, picking flowers in spring.

What would you do if someone were seeing you do all this, I mean you must do this right? I wonder if she will- get with him… before death?

The boy thinks about him- I know, I have seen them in the bakery, school and at my home. Likewise, one is too old now to volunteer; he is older for her like a teenager. This is standard, the Family devotion only goes so far for most people on earning diurnal.

(Back)

Elody- I was scared… 'I suppose now that my mother was locked in some mysterious world of sadness lost in her crazies.'' There was no choice, Likewise, for me to understand… At so young- Likewise, at the time, all I knew was that I had lost not only a father, Likewise, a mother as well.

Zoie- AKA the girl talking to you- hi! It has become known that my mother is crazy now lost in this madness… of being with my dad in her mind… that everyone looks down on us even more, and what they are- shit on a boot next to a doorstep. They longer care for us being a money pit in society. I grew up seeing those home kids at school, seeing them go up fast made of ply.

All white, in and out. No colors… not a worm at all so cold. The sweet tiny girl who cried when I cried before she even knew the reason, who brushed at the sight of a boy, looking at her walking to school, who still wet the bed some nights, because of seeing my dad beating on my mom for hitting it before the time was done or spending money.

He had hated her she loved him- yet he was good to us- the money goes to the kids not you for dumb shit- coal dust I tack in is not for you to blow- on dresses I need food- and the kids are starving- why. Let us just say the happy sexy time is all that keeps them cheerful to us even. Not a good

matchup yet he wanted her when she was younger.

The sadness, the marks of angry hands on their faces, the hopelessness that curled their shoulders forward. I could never let that happen to Elody. The community home would crush her like a bug. So- I kept our predicament a secret.

18

However, the money ran out and we were slowly starving to death. There is no other way to put it other then, I kept telling myself if I could only hold out, Elody turn ten on the 14th and be able to sign up for the high leaves class at school, and a working job with younger kids in the birthing rooms, that money went to me- I

held it for her… I become a mom, I have the hunter’s job… getting food and seeing that she has what she needs. I see that she is bathed, brushes her hair, and teeth, things like that. I clean her dress up and hang the line.

For three days, we had had nothing. Likewise, boiled water with some old, dried mint leaves I had found in the back of a cupboard. Elody- I remember the rain showers had waterlogged through my sister’s lager coat, leaving me chilled to the bone. By the time the market closed, I was there seeing if I could beg for money and food also playing the guitar, all blue fades into white, worn with gray shown some on the back and neck, it has a defeat tall paces,

something I do not get… yet it a Gibson, it looks crappy yet sounds okay to me and most worm when the days are so cold and you must be by a barn burl to stay warm, I get an amp out of a dumpster by my home were this Gibson was too. Blue binding, I have my logo on the back with my number- my name, and my life story on it.

And that is the saying-

Love is foolish with the one you want to be what to not be- to some like me I must see, the tournament of warfare not far too careful, they see me fight, in their sight, day and night, is this right? The height of love is death at the end of what is lasting. I will be remembered like the bluebird in

flight- see my tears as they dry- going high- either way like a rattle that does not matter:

'Besides- my yearning for the balance of life always be in your erranding. Nothing more nothing less.'

I was shaking so hard I dropped clothes in a mud puddle when I saw the firing line 100 men and 80 girl is all blast all at once babies too and little kids, they ran the way shot in the handgun above the nose, for not giving in… they form part 15 no longer a town at all. I did not pick it up for fear I would keel over and be unable to regain my feet. Besides, no one wanted those clothes. And then they would stop to reload their clothes, and fire them empty

one girl was naked, no more than three, and I saw her run and fall to a trooper.

I named her Laina. She had no name, just a number, I do not know what it was about her- Likewise, I had to see that she was remembered, yet like all the others she either went to the mass graves. Where I saw them just tossed her in like trash with all the other nude bodies young and old alike. I would most like to be eaten by something wild in the woods when this all goes down… I do not see why it is any different than this- may be better. I wonder if I should just take the gun now and end it before it starts- only one thing stops me… and that is the faith of young adoration. OR

I WOULD…! I have it here at my temple- why not right? I try yet I

cannot do this…

I cannot…

I cannot…

I cannot…

I squeeze my eyes thigh… I cannot… they taunt me too… in my mind look in my penitentiary sterol- like the room awaiting my task the next day where I will have it all-or so they say- I ask why to bother. They are cute about it by giving us things to end it before it starts… to see if they can crack you. It is my last big meal- might as well rub it in- fun- they know we are not going to eat- that we cannot hold it-

yet we starved up to this point- yet that is the point to play with us to Freak- with us. Thinking about the hell week to come- therefore…?

19

Elody- I remember crawling into bed, and fell into a dreamless sleep, yet fearful all feeling like I was gun down or chased by someone. It did not occur to me until the next morning that the boy might have burned the bread on purpose. Might have released the loaves into the flames, knowing it meant being punished, and then delivered them to me. The boy the time would glance my way, Likewise, I was watching him not letting him see that I was. Because of the bread, because of the red

weal that stood out on his cheekbone. What had she hit him with? My dad never hit us, yet mom was the bitch. I could not even imagine if- she was that in more than one way. You get that…?

The boy took one look back to the bakery as if checking that the coast was clear, then, his attention back to bread in my direction. The second quickly followed, he was in the room over the way they made sure we could see one another yet not be with each other beforehand- just part of- the tournament they played, closing the kitchen door tightly behind him.

Zoie- I remember- I reached out to Elody and she climbed on my lap when she was seven, her arms around my neck, and

head on my shoulder. Like- she did when she was a toddler; like she did the night before.

I remember- My mother sits beside me and never hugs her arms around us. For a few minutes, we said nothing. Then I start telling them all the things they must reminisce about doing so now that I will not be there to do them for them. Yet for her news, she never really was… just so you know mom!

The takeout- When I am done with teaching about energy, and staying in school homework, and stop turning in to my mother. I calm down for the night after seeing her off- thinking about the times- I would do not bother suggesting Elody learn

to hunt for I had never thought she would be the one. She has no background in the killing, only seeing- I tried to teach her a couple of times and it was catastrophic- she feels on her Likewise and got hurt- I said- no more. The sticks horrified her, and whenever I shot something, she would get teary, and talk about how cute it was not to do that- we must live, I said. We might be able to heal it if we got it home soon enough- not understand it was not moving anymore- so I distillate on that too- like what is she going to do here? Lay- there and die…?

I must be a babysitter- I cannot cock out on the flames and leave Elody on her own to run free- I knew she would get lost

like a puppy. There is no me now to keep you both alive if I do not do this and I am the only girl here too. It does not matter what happens- to her I would never forgive myself- whatever you see…

Parting words- You have to assure me you'll battle!' My voice whispers not to draw attention- that she may not be the best one in the call outs. The fear I abandoned- felt was solid and vice versa. I pulled her arm from my grasp, moved out of the holding room. 'I was feeling sick; I could have treated myself if I'd had the medicine- yet I can buy that stuff- you deal with it.'

That is life- 'OH- JUST

DEAL WITH IT!'

20

Clasping my hands to her face… holding in like- so tiny 'You have to take the fight and do- all that I do for you on your own you think you can do that- umm- hum- she whispered softly and thoughtfully- looking up at me towering over her, too. You are so fast and brave. You can win- you could you know- you could get this- do it for me. 'I've seen her carried off by them- the troopers- kicking and screaming like a newborn. Suffering from immobilizing sadness since- I see her on the screens we all do like an animal- locked in the pound. It is a sickness of the kiss of death- the last kiss- to be given by me to her, Likewise, it is one we cannot afford. Her- she was my

world- my… everything- I cannot win said- Elody- you must know that in her heart. The competition will be far beyond my abilities. Kids from wealthier districts, where winning is a huge honor, who have not been trained for… Your whole life I never did this for you- and now I must kick myself for not- you understand this…?

Boys- do not trust them all- go with your gut and in here she points- to her head and heart. Those all see them, they, not your friends, do not let them be- they are two to three times your size, do not be intimidated- you know that word right- Um-hum she said. This one girl girls over her, she looks off to show with her eyes- not to scare you- she who knows 50, unlike ways to kill you with a

blade. Oh, there will be people like me, too. People want to weed out before the real fun begins. She threw a knife into a five-year-old- a dead girl walking- it hit her in the left eye- at trials killing her- they use real kids here at this, so you are going to have to not care about seeing a life end. Were all a waste of a bloodline why not they said this year why not… have real targets- young helpless- kids. It is a sick youngling to see them lose a life- they say wishing from the screens- like dogs forming at a moth in heat.

Her last words- 'I won't… I cannot! You know I will not! Zoie, it repeats over and over in my brain- 'he says, and they yank us apart and slam the door, and I'll never know what it was he desired me to

evoke. It is a little ride from Evenhandedness-

Building to the 1920's train station. I have never been in a car before and a mostly would and black truck- that looks like it out of the 1921 mostly world cars are outdated now- yet I get to have this- must if all ride rails.

Elody- car's- Seldom even ridden in motor carriages. In the ridge, we travel on foot- or rail- most do not have the money to have wonderful things, and if they did, they were overturned. I have seen a few puttering around yet never in one… they bring in the food for the rich and the rich are the one that has the most- buying the troopers off. I see the same year of a truck

going down the brick, fire-engine color red, running after the blazes dinging a bell. I have been right not to cry about all this, yet I could not hold it in. The station is swarming, now- I knew really- with reporters in my face I shy away- I do not want the spotlight with their insect-like cameras trained staunchly on my face as I make my way over the height bridge in the world.

Nevertheless, I have had a lot of exercise at wiping my face clean of emotions with all the death I have seen. I catch a hint of myself on the television screen over the way they giggle at that- look I made- on the wall that is an expression of my influx of lives and feel content that I seem almost

fearful. If I am going to cry, now is the time to do it. By morning, I will be able to wash the damage done by the tears on my face. Nonetheless, there were lots of tears too. I am too tired yet not too numb to cry. The only thing I feel is a desire to be somewhere else.

So, I let the train rock me into oblivion. I put the see-through lace outfit back on that they give us to sleep in, just slightly crumpled from spending the night on the floor rocking.

21

Time to move the said- there- and passed- on and off- the train finally begins to slow, and suddenly bright light floods the compartment. I ran to the window to see

what we had only seen on television, the Capitol, the ruling city. The cameras have not lied about its splendor. If anything, they have not captured the magnificence of the glistening buildings in white and gray and cobalt glass hues that tower into the air. The people begin to point at us eagerly as they are recognizing an honor girl train rolling into the city.

I step away from the window, sickened by their excitement, knowing they cannot wait to watch us die. I see the boy I like over in his car- he holds his ground not being all into me, yet I could tell he was, waving and smiling at the gazing crowd. He only stops when the train pulls into the

station, blocking us from their view I blow him a kiss- no one saw…

Yesterday to say my final goodbyes to my one girlfriend Samee and family. Nevertheless, that is a dark and creaky thing that moves like a snail and smells of sour milk. The walls of this elevator are made of crystal so that you can watch the individuals on the ground floor shrink to ants as you shoot up into the air. I look over the city is just what you would think it looks like- all big and glass-ie. Say hello to your new home for a week- The Training Center has a tower designed exclusively for honors girls. This will be our home until the definite Stars begin. Each community has an entire

floor. You simply step onto a silo and press the number of your district.

Bed- I kick off my shoes and climb undertaking it all off that how I sleep, or I can I have to do this- I play with the hood and fall fast asleep- it is a girl thing- the covers over me I see nothing Likewise, that boy in my tight eyes. The shivering has not stopped. The girl does not even remember me. Nonetheless, I know she does. You do not forget the face of the person who was your last hope. I pull the covers up over my head as if this will protect me from the redheaded girl who cannot speak. Likewise, I can feel her eyes staring at me, piercing through walls, doors, and bedding. I wonder if she will enjoy watching me- over there-

like she would be killing her or the other way around- we share this room now.

2 girls in a small room. They want to see if we are going to kill before the time! Then I am overwhelmed in light-yellow foam that I must scrape off with a heavy bristled brush. Oh, well. At least my blood is flowing. Slowly, I drag myself out of bed and into the shower. I arbitrarily punch similarly, tons on the control board, and end up hopping from foot to foot as alternating jets of icy cold and steaming hot water assault me. I put my hair down in the two braids down my front side. This is the first time since the morning of reaping that I resemble myself. No fancy hair and no fancy clothes yet mostly lacy to see if you have cuts or packing hidden stuff,

no flaming capes. Just me. Looking like I could be headed for the woods. It calms me.

I am nervous about the training. There will be a week of this the first days in which all the star girls practice together with the targets of killing life.

On the last evening, we will each get a chance to achieve in isolation before the star-makers. The thought of meeting the other star's uncompromising makes me nauseous. I turn the roll I have just taken from the basket over and over in my hands. Likewise, then my famine is gone, only the famine of blood to kill is all I need now.

Not- Not- Not ME! It is them making ME!

The chatting- I try to focus on the talk, which has twisted to our interview clothes, I do okay they say I need to talk more they say- yet she is cute. We all shower together with us girls. I do not like this. I am shy and they look at me like they are meeting. And what to play with me- U- No! When I open my door, the redheaded girl is collecting my United and boots from where I left them on the floor before my shower. I want to say sorry for getting her in trouble earlier when I tripped on her hair walking in it that long. The face of the redheaded girl intertwines with gory images from the earlier Famine Tournament, with my mother withdrawn and unreachable, with My sister emaciated and terrified. I bolt up screaming for my father to run as

the mine explodes into a million deadly bits of light.

Dawn is breaking through the windows I see it all there are no covers on the big windows, yet everyone saw me do everything on-screen even shower and what I did in bed there are even cams in my fingers and under the sheets how I do not know- Likewise, I know they are- there to see me do that too.

Eat- I had set out to tell her I was sorry about dinner. Nonetheless, I remember I am not supposed to speak to her unless I am giving her an order. She avoids my eyes as we make our way to the table, gives a small nod, and eats. My

slumbers are filled with disturbing dreams of depth, wetness, and death.

The Capitol has a misty, haunted air. My headaches and I must have bitten into the side of my cheek at night. My tongue probes the ragged flesh and I taste blood.

The boy I like- like- I exchange a look with him. 'I don't have any secret about having the tingles down there for him, I want to lock lips at some point I have to before the end.' The end of what is that? Really what is that all about?' I've eaten enough of your squirrels, yet I don’t know how to kill one- how can I kill a child?' I never thought about him eating the squirrels I shot. Somehow, I for one

continuously see in your mind's eye- himself being there I remember her saying. Not out of greed- he there for you to remember. On the other hand, then again for the reason, that town families usually eat expensively Likewise, her meat. Beef and chicken and horse. I recall this… 'There's always hand-to-hand combat.

All you need is to produce a knife, and you will at least stand a chance. If I get jumped, I'm dead!' I can hear my voice rising in anger. I do not like to kill. I remember saying… cut to now- 'You won't-mind- if it’s to live! You will be living up in some tree-eating raw squirrels and picking off individuals with arrows. You know what my Zoie said to me when she came to say

goodbye as if to cheer me up, she says neighborhood 14 will finally have a winner. Then I comprehended, she did not mean me, she meant you!' said- the boy.

The boy- she is a dismissal, I know- I hope to look out for her- until the time comes, I can no longer.

Elody- I know he is not lying about that- I heard in his thoughts before all of this. Him- he has-, physical power that is strong and perfect tilts his eyes ever so right and his six-pack chest at me in the light- the advantage with the girls- would I be that girl- to see the eyes shine for me- as I look at these white teeth- ever so right.

Training Center- Throw a spear- a woman said- that was teaching at the nine-

year-old girl's head and kill her- kill her- if you do not you go down in your points. Spend the time trying to learn something you do not know, I remember her saying to me- going back- Weights try do not overdo and hurt your body, do not reveal how much you can lift in front of the other stars. They do not need to see that you are meeker than they are, you are going to train a group that is not far- it kills, or they kill you without blinking- and lick you up and down to spit on it, rubbing it all in you. The plan's the same for both of you. If you are smart, you will get this I cannot say- just think heart Elody and go with your intentions- wink.

Zoie- Learn to tie a decent knot and so need your gun and to pack ammo- I do

not even care about the bow much to show- that if you run out of other things you only have five aero's anyways, that are tipped in bad stuff- do not tuck the tip- K. Um-hum- I say childishly. Save showing a knife for there going at that point- what you are best at until your private sessions. Are we good?' I nod- Zoie this was the day before the callouts. Do not fire the small one unless it is deep in their left boob, and squeeze hard it will take about a day for them to die slowly- yet they back off. Do not ever panic- or you will die- do not sweat in the cold your you will die- also.

Now night- I bit my lip and stalk back to my room, making sure he- the boy that I like- can hear the door slam yet he

sees all of me with the screen in his room and the double-sided firebox. I sit on the bed, undressing, hating him over they are doing things I do not understand, hating myself hard saying my name- to mention that I was feeling the same. Is it- love…?

Is this love- I see and now feel…?

As his thought was turned on to me in my mind and his by them. In my bed him have this with me- and does he- it was a lovemaking moment of heightened lust. The people went nuts for us- feeling this moment, of zenith.

Pretending to be friends, the next day I hear giggles from the other girls! Talking about each other's strengths is a bond, insisting the other take credit for

their abilities. Because, in fact, at some point, we are going to have to knock it off and accept we are bitter adversaries. Stupid instruction that we stick together in training like his hand on me at night. It is my fault I was ripped on his too, I was doing it right never did that one, yet I saw it through his eyes- and mine in his- with switched like bodies at the end feeling, and seeing within and out, for telling him he did not have to coach us disjointedly.

Nevertheless, that did not mean I wanted to do everything with him today so they could see the crematory- of a puppy- the love they call it. He was all into me not letting his hand off me and not stopping

them from his hands feeling me up down the uniform. Yah

I had a hand full of Likewise, - so did he- cute right!

22

I hear his voice in my head- saying cute things. She has no idea- over there that this is what she was thinking about. Although along with what she needed to know. I made sure she knew what not to hear- and see- in training… for she is the girl I picked to work with as a team. The effect she can have on him is a lot, some say he is not thinking clearly to learn to fight- that he will pass fast- daydreaming of her- ha, that is what they think he said- in his thoughts. Visibly they meant to degrade me

and him. -Right? Likewise, a tiny part of my phenomena is praise. That he meant I was interesting- in some way.

It is ten p.m. I clean my teeth and smooth back my hair again. Anger temporarily blocked out my nervousness about meeting the other teams, Likewise, now I can feel my anxiety rising once more. I catch myself biting my nails.

Late-night- It is weird how much he has noticed me from within and out. Alike with the kindness- he is paid to my hunting- over the years- um like was not enough. Besides deceptively, I have not been as oblivious to him as I imagined, moreover. I have kept track of all of this in my beep mind, they said.

Blood spatter- off with youngling's heads- let the bodies hit the floor- let the young bodies hit the floor! DEATH! I look around at the Career girls who are showing off, obviously trying to intimidate the field. Then at the others, the malnourished, the incompetent, shakily having their first education with a knife or an ax. They walk up and we show off with them having to be programmed in their mind to die- they even get sick to ask for it. 100 girls under 10 knocked-off in less than 30 minutes… Only five low-class boys were hurt, not all killed.

The doors open into an enormous gymnasium filled with various weapons to practice with- you in the fight we only have what we had at our homes- so if you have an

Ak-47 good for you- I do not- far no- yet that is not what this is about- it is about blood falling to the floor!

I move on to the obstacle courses. The actual training rooms are below the ground level of our building- and in the night lit fields. With these elevators going in and out with them in control- yet again, the ride is less than a few moments. Although it is not yet nine in the morning, we were here all day today, we are the last ones to arrive.

The other stars are met in a tense circle like a dojo- it is about respect to the past- twisted in their tournament.

My man and I are the only two dressed alike. As soon as we join the circle, the head trainer, tall, Experts in each skill

will remain at their positions, a sporty female named steps up and begins to explain the training agenda she towers over me not him though. Some of the stations teach survival skills, other fighting techniques. We are forbidden to engage in any combative exercise with another try Likewise. There are assistants on hand if we want to practice with a partner. We will be free to travel from area to area as we choose, according to our mentor's instructions. 'Suppose we tie some knots,' I say, they all giggle- like I am retarded! He said it was cute…! Is that all that matters?

We pass an unfilled post where the trainer seems satisfied to have schoolchildren. You get the feeling that the

knot-tying class is not the Starvation stars burning spot. When he apprehends, I know something about snares, he shows us a simple, excellent trap that will leave a human competitor dangling by a leg from a tree- now outside in the fields barricaded in with high walls- all white. And bright lights…We concentrate on this one skill for an hour until both of us have mastered all that is needed. Then we move on to concealment. He genuinely enjoys this station, twirling a combination of mud and clay and berry juices around on his pale skin, weaving disguises from vines and leaves.

The instructor who runs the concealment position is full of passion for his work- yes some are just A-holes.

23

(Back)

The crescent moon roll dotted with seeds from Community 13. Somehow, although it is made from the same gear as I walk to 14, it looks a lot more mouthwatering than the horrible drop biscuits that are the standard fare at home. I had to get something- didn't I?

Playing with him- We both give a convincing laugh and ignore the stares from around the room. I tried breathing- my face lost- as I recall the event, a Hallie story, in

which I had stupidly defied a black bear over the right to sleep. My boy is laughing and asks questions right on cue.

He is much better at this than I am at that too- so cute, right? On the second day, while we are taking a shot at spear throwing, he whispers to me all sweet things and nothing. 'We have a shadow of me now.'

I throw my spear, which I am not too bad at if I do not have to throw too far and see the little girl from Community 1 standing back a bit, watching us. She is ten years old, the other one that is small yet not as petite as me in stature. Up close she looks like a lost schoolgirl- walking in a playground. She has optimistic, dark, eyes

and lustrous skin and stands tilted up on her toes with her arms slightly extended to her sides, as if ready to take wing at the smallest amount of sound. It is impossible not to think of a bluebird.

I bit my lip. Hallie is a small yellow flower that grows in the Field. Leah. My sister Rose. Neither of them could tip the scale at seventy pounds soaking wet.

(Thinking back, I was…)

Cut ripped out into reality- I pick up another spear while my boy throws one that I gave him. 'Her names are Leah,' I say softly. I remember her some…

My heart sinks… Almost all the boys and at least half of the girls are bigger than

I am, even though many of the tries Likewise, I have never been fed properly. Kids- You can see it in their bones, their skin, and the hollow look in their eyes.

Now that I know she is there, it is hard to ignore, that I am the youngest child in the room. She slips up and joins us at different stations. Like me, she is clever with plants, climbs swiftly, and has a good aim. She can hit the target every time with a slingshot. What is a slingshot against a 225-pound male with a sword that is going to get her…? Oh, yes this is all she must fight with-far-right? NO!

I read down the list of the skills from stations I was part of my eyes cannot help flitting around to the others. It is the

first time we have been collected, on level ground, in simple clothes. The exceptions are the kids from the wealthier districts, the volunteers, the ones who have been fed and trained throughout their lives for this moment. I may be smaller naturally, Likewise, overall, my family's ingenuity has given me an edge in that area.

The slight benefit I held coming into the Training Center, my fiery entrance last night, seems to disappear in the attendance of my opposition. The others were jealous of us- I knew- he knew, Likewise, not because we were astounding since our graphic designer and a team like the makeup guys were. That is what we look at that part and all.

About- It is technically against the rules to train to try Likewise before they reach the Capitol Likewise, it happens every year. The meat and plants from the woods combined with the exertion it took to get them have given me a healthier body than most of those I see around me.

Now I see nothing Likewise, contempt in the glances of the Career trying Likewise. Each must have fifty to a hundred pounds on me.

In area 14, we call them occupation acknowledgments or just careers. Also, like as not, the champion will be one of them. They project arrogance and prominently. I stand straight up, and while I am thin, I am

strong. The tri Likewise, from 1, 2, and 7 conventionally have this look about them.

When Alla releases us, they head straight for the lethal tall stick- with a gold spoon up to her. Likewise, she looks over all the weapons in the gym and handles them with ease.

I am thinking that it is lucky I am a fast runner when he nudges my arm and I jump yet in an effective way. He is still beside me- his expression is sober- yet loving to me only.

Moving on- 'Where would you like to begin?' When we finally escape to bed on the second night with me, he mumbles that were not getting any sleep, I make a sound that is somewhere between a snort and a

laugh, saying okay- I want what I want- so let give them a late-night show to see- Then catch myself doing more than ever with him. It is messing with my mind too much, trying to keep straight when we are friends, not full-on lovers at this age- yet age is nothing to them or us at this point- we have sex all night! Then when we are not ready for all this we no- yet we got it all down and in and out, to say the least. Bang! Bang- bang- bang- bang! You know exactly what will happen by that! Done! Aww- okay put it back in- We even broke the bed! I will know where we stand with the folks seeing this- we have fans big time.

'Let us pretend there's no one around- and keep on keeping on with this.'

'God not so fast and hard'- I no- take it- I said riding even hard for that to go- you have too-

'Well- uh,' he said- you are good I say. Um-mm we said together, and I got the O!

Next to seeing all the wannabes! Seeing all the ass with cams! - I am sick of this. I did not sleep last night- crank yes, after that, we only talked in front of people- about how I got plowed- and then frogged him after- and went for the good night kiss too- and my love life at nine years old. Crap- They start to call our numbers out of lunch, for our cloistered sessions with the tournament makers. The area by region, first the girl, then the boy.

As usual, Community 14 is slated to go first- for I am the youngster here they call me. We linger in the dining room, unsure where else to go. No one comes back once they have left. As the room empties, the pressure to appear friendly lightens. By the time they call Leah, we are left alone. We sit in silence until they summon my lover to come. He rises- with my hand in hand.

'Thanks. I will,' he says. 'You- Shoot straight.'

I nod. I do not know why I said anything at all. Although if I am going to lose, I would rather him win than the others.

Better for our district, for my mother and my sister.

After about fifteen minutes, they called my name. I smooth my hair, set my shoulders back, and walk into the gymnasium. Instantly, I know I am in trouble. They have been here too long, the Tournament Makers. Sat through twenty-three other demonstrations. I had too much wine, most of them. I want more than anything to go home.

There is nothing I can do Likewise, continue with the plan. I walk to the archery station. Oh, the weapons!

I have been itching to get my hands on them for days! Bows made of wood, plastic, metal, and materials I cannot even name. Arrows with feathers cut in flawless uniform lines. I choose a bow, string it, and

sling the matching quiver of arrows over my shoulder.

There is a shooting range, Likewise, it is much too limited. Standard bull's-eyes and human silhouettes. I walk to the center of the gymnasium and pick my first target. The dummy was used for knife practice. Even as I pull back on the bow- I know something is wrong. The string's tighter than the one I use at home. The arrow's more rigid. I miss the dummy by a couple of inches and lose what

little attention I had been commanding. For a moment, I am humiliated, then I head back to the bullseye. I shoot repeatedly until I get the feel of these new weapons.

Back in the center of the gymnasium, I take my initial position and skewer the dummy right through the heart. Then I sever the rope that holds the sandbag for boxing, and the bag splits open as it slams to the ground. Without pausing, I shoulder to roll forward, come upon one knee, and send an arrow into one of the hanging lights high above the gymnasium floor. A shower of sparks bursts from the fixture.

It is an excellent shooting. I turn to the Tournament Makers. A few are nodding approval, Likewise, most of them are fixated on a roast pig that has just arrived at their banquet table.

Suddenly, I am furious that with my life on the line, they do not even have the decency to pay attention to me. That I am being upstaged by a dead pig. My heart starts to pound, I can feel my face burning. Without thinking, I pull an arrow from my quiver and send it straight at the Tournament maker's table. I hear shouts of alarm as people stumble back. The arrow skewers the apple in the pig's mouth and pins it to the wall behind it. Everyone stares at me in disbelief.

'Thank you for your consideration,' I say. Then I give a slight bow and walk straight toward the exit without being dismissed.

As I stride toward the elevator, I fling my bow to one side and my quiver to the other. I brush past the gaping Avoxes who guard the elevators and hit the number twelve landed on with my fist. The doors slide together, and I zip upward. I make it back to my floor before the tears start running down my cheeks. I can hear the others calling me from the sitting room. Likewise, I fly down the hall into my room, bolt the door, and fling myself onto my bed.

Then I begin to sob.

Now- I have done it! Now I have ruined everything! If I had stood even a ghost of a chance, it vanished when I sent that arrow flying at the Tournament makers. What will they do to me now? Arrest me?

Execute me? Cut my tongue and turn me into an Avex so I can wait on the future stars of Panel?

What was I thinking, shooting at the Tournament makers? Unquestionably, I am situated, I was shooting at that apple, because I was so angry at being overlooked. I was not trying to kill one of them, yet I want so- to do that. If I would have, I would be dead fast!

Oh, what does it matter? It is not like I was going to win the Tournament anyway. Who cares what they do to me? What scares me is what they might do to Zoie and me, how my family might suffer now because of my impulsiveness. Will they take their few belongings, or send my

mother to prison and me to the community home, or kill them? They would not kill them, would they?

Why not? What do they care about? I should have hung around and asked for forgiveness. Otherwise, I chuckled, like it was a big pun. Then maybe I would have found some compassion. Likewise, then again instead, I followed out of the place in the worst- mannered manner conceivable.

I shout for them to go away and eventually they do. It takes at least an hour for me to cry myself out. Then I just lay curled up on the bed, stroking the silken sheets with my hood, feeling him run through and out of me- watching the sunset over all the land- they all could see in, and

the cam was flaking its red-light- right down where you could see my pinkie- kitty. That is what they asked for when sending in money for me to get sponsors. Being cute and hot sales to them- that's what I was whispering in my mind to him over the way to his room.

In the early parts of the day at the stars, before that though, they will give me a score so low, no one in their right mind would sponsor me. That is what will happen tonight. Since the training is not open to viewers, the Tournament makers announce a score for each player. I expect guards to come for me. Nevertheless, as time passes, it seems less likely.

I calmed down. They still need a girl - from constituency 14, don't they? If the

Tournament makers want to punish me, they can do it publicly. Wait until I am in the arena and sick, starving wild animals on me. You can bet they will make sure I do not have a bow and arrow to protect me. Also- with what I said before. It gives the audience a starting place for the betting that will continue throughout the stars.

I wish the stylists had not shown up because for some reason, I do not like the idea of substandard them. It is as if I have tossed away all the decent work they did at the opening ceremonies without a thought. I avoid looking at anyone as I take tiny Spoonfuls of potato soup. The saltiness reminds me of my tears. I had been anticipating my shooting skills might get me

a six or a seven or more- like a ten, even if I am not particularly powerful. Now I am sure-

I will have the lowest score of twenty-five. If no one sponsors me, my odds of staying alive decrease to zip.

(Back)

The walkout of the town as a star the others would spit- lap- bit and rip on us thinking they were higher up thin us- we did this naked as the day we came into this hellish world. The community has gotten rid of us- like trash. We are the property of them- not a farce- they do not want us here or anywhere in these parts after our time is up- unless you are the winner- there weeding us out.

The walk was long and blasting on the feet- my sister saying you will make it back- no you will not on girl said. On the train, I sat- box cars- changed. I had to shove a tube up my Likewise, - hidden way up in my ass- so far, I could feel it in my gut, and they thought it was poopy- with 1,000 or so of currency in it. You saw me take that out- gross right! 50% of us will pass the first day- you can make it if you have the cash!

Run- there is no one or place to go- money is the way out- one cut a girl got last night to get the cash out of her. Syaga was her… she was odd, to say the least. Famine was high- in the cars where they opened them and hosed you down, children alike- still naked. Sleep was hard on the cars

rocking down the skinny rail tracks- feeling every bump- with eyes over the way showing- I WANT TO KILL- YOU.

Hot and cold in the blue and white cars- Steam and sound of highs over rolling hills. I was shaken on the hand and told by Syasa she would cut my head off if I sucked on her. The march passes us we look- making a distraction- with a cut to a face- some run for it going for the river over the way- yet they get some and smash their feet not killing them- that would be like killing a girl before banging her with yah did- just making sure they would never get away- hobbling they call it. One was shot- I did not even know her name- yet no one gives a rat's ass. The smalls of pigs and fish- rotting

with humans- a head off over the way- too much- we walk into the camp are new homes. Line up they yell at the head man; the drummer plays his death march.

The boy Sage is looking dumb with his mouth open.

You are- Jailers-

Rolls called out-

The first time one tries to escape at 3 years of jail time- and the right to kill you without say. 2nd adds 2 more each time.

Masturbate is a NO- something that you should do it drains strength unless a par team. Those that do well have- do this in front of a camera and say why they need it.

Saving is done in 5 minutes by the hands of a staffer where you can shower for 15 minutes. We march around still unclothed as they all see… I was the one that I wanted to see the most is all pubescent.

Boys love that… so they can see it all!

There I was… until training.

All are chained down to their bad unless in a partnership. The hospitality was high- at some ran there too- killed with high power Tommy guns.

24

I got my boy fast before I went here, yet I do love him. I- he was the crunch of my

life anyway- I said to them in a chat… Hallie all Leah. The rat that said they would buy you out- is Tostito- give a long run and ways out- yet into a trap. A boy is dragging a dead girl by the hair no- still marching around to show how strong we are. I could hear the accordion music of my homeland playing in my mind as I was a week yet not stopping.

I can get you a train- he would say to them- and you would get there, and it was a rusted out 1888, with parts missing. I had no choice, one said- if I stay in this hole- I will perish! She came back hobbled, and she killed herself by staking her fist down her mouth.

Oh yeah- Yet not after donning these 5 times. We are going to break you!

That is what they said to us as we got on the train here.

Zoie- I ran after her not caring about life- I was even placed in an open jail-like room for saying something to a trooper he did not like- where it would rain- or sun or more- no lights- bats and rats all over- I had to poop in the corner. I was sent to Demise Island over in the triangle, you can see me here waking passing, I know I would not make it back to see if she is alive- yet I know I might- if I stay strong and eat all they give I know that I can make it some- its jizz full- watery shit they give me.

When I pop my head out the steel doors. I said FU- and get my food cut ½ of what it was!! I giggled crazily in the rain

coming down… and when I shit- they do not like that closing off the top with a blackout plat.

I started eating bugs… The crawling was nuts in the mud- and woodlands. I even jumped off 1,200 feet in the air. They would hold my head with a pipe to make me suffer- for being me. The girl that showed her what she needed to know. I look good hair falling out- I know I look okay- death not far- yet I must be strong for her- even if the odds are not in my favor. I rip my teeth out that were rotting. A trooper would come in every night and fondle me- I could not do anything or more time was added. He would kiss me all over too- I fought some- yet gave in to get out. I saw a girl being dragged out by their

lags, for them to have a good time- I was one- and yes, we all were stripped. This is what I get just for my blood type and heritage. Used as -ho! I got tattoos; I did not want to… covering my arms.

I get 50 more nights- for yelling at the troopers for playing with myself, yet can you not- some say they do… lies? I am failing, and I know… that is okay if it is for her to live on.

(Forward)

2 years of this I was a broken girl.

25

One was made a show- and the blade went down hard and fast- she was only five. The number, which is between one

and twelve, one being irredeemably bad and twelve being unattainably high, signifies the promise of the try Likewise. The mark is not a guarantee of which person will win. It is only an indication of the potential to try Likewise, shown in training.

Frequently, because of the variables in the actual arena, high scoring tries Likewise, go down almost immediately. As well as a few years ago, the boy who won the Stars only received a three. Still, the scores can help or hurt individual stars in terms of sponsorship. I masticated that… I choose to go.

The scores will be televised tonight. It is not like I can hide what happened forever. I go to the bathroom and wash my

face, Likewise, it is still red and splotchy. All and sundry waiting at the table, even Pahiya and Lattie. The adults begin some chit chat about the weather forecast, and I let my eyes meet us and my boy. He raises his eyebrows. A question. What happened? I just give my head a small shake. Then, as they are serving the main course, I hear the reporter say, 'Okay, enough small talk, just how bad were you today?'

Somehow calling me sweetheart is off enough at this for an awe moment- that I am at least able to speak. 'I shot an arrow at the Tournament makers to show what big crowds I can do.' Everyone stopped eating when I shot girls with one aero- as they were moving. 'You what?' The horror in

Gannah's voice confirms my worst suspicions.

'I shot an arrow at them. Not exactly at them. In their direction. It is like My boy said, I was shooting, and they were ignoring me and me just. I just lost my head, so I shot an apple out of their stupid roast pig's mouth!' I speak.

'And what did they say?' Say Cinna carefully.

'Nothing. Or I do not know. I walked out after that,' I say.

'Without being dismissed?' Gasps Gannah. 'I dismissed myself,' I said. I remember how I promised my sister that I

really would try to win, and I feel like a ton of coal has dropped on me.

See they would have to reveal what happened in the Training Center for it to have any worthwhile effect on the population. People would need to know what you did. Likewise, they cannot sense it is secret, so it would be a waste of effort,' says Gannah. 'More likely they'll make your life hell in the arena.' 'Well, they've already promised to do that to us anyway,' says my strong brave man.' Well, that's that,' says Gannah.

Then he Likewise, terms into a roll.

'Do you think they'll arrest me?' I ask.

'Doubt it… be a pain to replace you at this stage,' says Gannah.

'What about my household…?' I speak.

'Will they discipline them…?'

'Don't think so- maybe have them show the spread eagle…?

(Giggling) the many- many- people, in the stadium.

Would not make much sense.

'Very Leah,' says Gannah. And I realize the impossible has happened. They have cheered me up. Gannah picks up a pork chop with his fingers, which makes Gannah frown, and dunks it in his wine.

He rips off a hunk of meat and starts to chuckle. 'What were their faces like?' I can feel the edges of my mouth tilting up. 'Shocked. Terrified. Uh, preposterous, some of them.' There was pop in my mind. 'One man tripped backward into a bowl of punch.'

Gannah guffaws and we all start laughing except Gannah, although even she is suppressing a smile. 'Well, it serves them right. It is their job to pay attention to you. And just because you come from Community Twelve is no excuse to ignore you.' Then her eyes dart around as if she is said something outrageous. 'I'm sorry, Likewise, that's what I think,' she says to no one in precise detail. 'I'll get an awfully bad score,' I say. 'Scores

only matter if they're particularly good, no one pays much attention to the bad or mediocre ones.

My family is safe… right?

Time to go- you…dah…

Next time you see me- I grin at him and realize that I am starving. I cut off a piece of pork, dunk it in mashed potatoes, and start eating. It is okay.

Plus, if they are safe- I do not feel they are, no actual harm has been done- they say to me in my mind- with a snicker- that I did not like- yet what could I do about it?

I chatted with my boy he said-

'People use that tactic,' he said to me. 'I hope that's how people interpret the four I'll probably get,' tells me. 'If that. Is anything less impressive than watching a person pick up a heavy ball and throw it a couple of yards? One landed on my foot… or toe.'

After dinner, we go to the sitting room to watch the scores announced on television. First, they show a photo of the tri Likewise, then flash their score below it. Most of the other players average a six. Surprisingly, little Hallie produces a seven. I do not know what she showed the judges, Likewise, she is so tiny it must have been impressive. The Career Likewise, - naturally get in the eight-to-ten range.

Constituency 14 comes up last, as usual. He pulls a five, the lowest of all boy it is all the sex they giggle- so at least a couple of the Tournament makers must have been watching him. I dig my fingernails into my palms as my face comes up, expecting the worst. Then they are flashing the number eleven on the screen. Everybody is slapping me on the ass and cheering and congratulating me- on getting F-ed and going to die for not having a real man.

Nevertheless, it does not seem real.

'There must be a mistake- I think with the- OH SHIT look on my face. How? How- could that happen…?' I asked Gannah.

At dawn, I lie in bed for a while, watching the sun come up on a beautiful

morning. It is on Sunday. A day off at home. I wonder if my sisters -is- well or not- in the woods yet, I knew that they would do something like that, and it came around to me.

'Elody, the girl with a shy spirit,' says Jannah and hugs me.

Jannah is an old friend of Gannah her gay girlfriend and that is not allowed either in the stars- or they would be a couple one reason, they were picked to wipe out their gay ways- a sickness as they say- just like our stars. Naughtily… they kiss- saying kill us!

And they did the next time we chatted, yet they were hand and hand- and in love- or so they said. One girl said that is

better than dying for Jesus… No comment- yet I have some faith.

My man- and I congratulate each other for making it this far, another awkward moment- as we make out… saying are dreams if we make it- knowing one must die- We've both done well, Likewise, what does that mean for the other? I escape to my room as quickly as possible and burrow down under the covers. The stress of the day, particularly the crying, has worn me out. I drifted off, relieved, and with the number eleven still flashing behind my eyelids.

I had been struggling along on my own for about six months when I first ran into Bale in the woods. It was a Sunday in

October, the air cool and pungent with dying things. I had spent the morning competing with the squirrels for nuts, and the slightly warmer afternoon wading in shallow ponds harvesting Elody.

26

The boy- The only meat I would shoot was a squirrel, which had practically run over my toes, in its quest for acorns, nevertheless, the animals would still be afoot, when the snow buried my other food sources. Having strayed further than afield than usual, I was speeding up back home, lugging my burlap sacks when I came across a dead rabbit. I had been trying to use snares all summer with no success, so I

could not help dropping my sacks to examine this one.

That's risky…' My fingers were just on the wire above one of the rabbits when a voice rang out. 'It was hanging by its neck in a thin wire a foot above my head. About fourteen yards away was another.

What she said to do- 'That you can't believe a little girl from Community fourteen has done this well. The whole thing has been more than you ever could have dreamed of. Talk about my clothes. How nice the people are…? How the city amazes you… say what you love- If you will not talk about yourself, at least complement the audience. Just keep turning it back around, all right.'

I am familiar with twitch-up snares because my father used them. When the prey is caught, it is jerked into the air out of the reach of other starving animals. I brought it back for her- and that was when love started.

Elody- The next hours are agonizing. At once, it is clear I cannot gush. We try to play overconfident. Likewise, I just do not have arrogance.

I am too 'defenseless' for ferociousness, I am not witty, humorous, erotic, and or secretive- like you.

~*~

At the Starvation Tournament part of the Stars, at every living being in the

Capitol by marvelous dishes around my room. When the girl with the rainbow hair comes in to turn down my bed, her eyes widen at the mess. 'Just leave it!' I yell at her. 'Just leave it alone!' I hate her, I never hated anyone, or anything till now- too, with her knowing reproachful eyes that call me a coward, a monster, a puppet of the Capitol, both now and then. For her, justice must finally be fashionable.

Why am I letting her? At least my death will help pay for the life of the boy in the woods. Likewise, instead of fleeing the room, the girl closes the door behind her and goes to the bathroom. She comes back with a damp cloth and wipes my face gently then cleans the blood from a broken plate

off my hands. Why is she doing this? She shakes her head. 'I should have tried to save you,' I whisper. Does this mean we were right to stand by? Has she forgiven me? 'No, it was wrong,' I say. She taps her licks making them wet, with her fingers then points to my chest with her knife. She means that I would just have ended dead. When we move on…

I spend the next hour helping the girl that has taken a liking to me in a sexual way and is cleaning the room and I am room. For sex, and to get on the good side of me- I play along not trusting her- is just sex, right?

Cleaned away is all that makes us little girls in a room, she turns down my

bed. I crawl in between the sheets like a five-year-old and let her tuck me in. Then she gets in with me- and the fun starts for her- I want her to stay until I fall asleep- I never like to sleep alone anyway- I always sleep with my sister. Yet she is taking time away from me and my lover- I get it so does he- to be there when I wake up. I want the protection of this girl, even though she never had mine.

In the morning, it is not the girl Likewise, my prep team who are hanging over me. I remember my lessons with my sisters in my mind.

Huge bright blue eyes, full red lips, lashes that throw off bits of light when I blink. Finally, they cover my entire body in a

powder that makes me shimmer in the lights. Then Melia goes to work on my hair, weaving strands of red into a pattern that begins at my left ear, wraps around my head, and then falls in one braid down my right shoulder.

The team works on me until late afternoon, turning my skin to glowing satin, stenciling patterns on my arms, painting flame designs on my twenty perfect nails. They erase my face with a layer of pale makeup and draw my features back out.

He walks in- with us two girls- 'Close your eyes girls,' he orders. Me- I can feel the silken inside as they slip it down over my stark- naked body, then the weight for his callouts of what he wanted to do with

me after he did what he wanted with her. I clutch her hand, rubbing my- hand as I blindly touch my goodies, glad to find there are at least two inside. There are some adjusting and jiggling. Then silence… and the end for the first. With just the girls as he and the viewers looking!

Fuck me- I yell! He crawls up between my legs where he stops to rid me of my sodden panties. He slings it away carelessly, his eyeing eyes never leaving the bare place they covered. He continues to stare, licking his lips– obviously beyond aroused by the sight Likewise, there is nothing to hide my intimate folds and I feel exposed, squirming, and certain that my blush reaches down there. He takes his

sweet, torturous time - enjoying his private viewing commotion. He makes no move to touch me. Likewise, the ravenous molds on his face are pushing me to run up onto him with wild desire, taking his time. I shift responses with desolate moments.

With my body on top of his I stroke my hand over the sprinkling of stubble, on-easily with myself with every curve and dip of his face. You are so precious, thank you for taking another chance on me. Laying in his chest with my head- while he grips my inner thighs, pushing them apart. Keep still or I will make you- then he kisses my lips and the other set. I gasp at his challenging threat and on pure instinct and raw desire,

my hips tilt up by their own accord, crazy in its need for any contact.

My legs are bent with my knees resting on either side of his head. My bottom sits on his chest, taking my weight, which leaves my secret opening utterly gaping and vulnerable, not to mention close to his sinful mouth. I can feel his breath on me, fluttering and making my heart stutter. His hands slip around, cupping my backside as he pushes me into him for the sex that was about to be made, inhaling deeply like what I feel inside me. Besides what she already had. Did I care yes- Likewise, I want to live off at night and I need a girlfriend too here.

27

The night before the stars- all the girls in their fancy dress all colors and shapes. 'I have to, I'm dizzy!' I am also giggling, which I think I have done never in my lifetime.

Likewise, the nerves and the spinning have gotten to me. My boy- wraps a protective arm around me. 'Don't worry, I've got you. Can't have you following in your mentor's footsteps.' He is the one- that I love here just so you know that- yet I am girl

I will try anything once even girls… I kissed a girl, and it was okay… I said to them passing out like… for what that all though it is not that bad- mom and dad know what happens with girls this age! They

are going to get Fucked- that is the times- just ask MTV- the show and the music.

This affiliation stops viewing moms and dads, I am sure your kid would say what is wrong with this? There was not much said- I am sure I no more than you do at my age in sex- like most girls my age! If you do like it do something else- yet I assure you- which your kid will not- and say your nuts, for not letting them look at me- for doing just what I am- and as of this year, it is right.

~*~

More chatting with the interviewers- Woot- woot is all I hear as I stand there looking at them all! They like me, they like me. I swallow hard. 'She asked

me to try hard to win.' The audience is frozen, hanging on my every word. 'And what did you say?' prompts Caesar gently. Nevertheless, instead of warmth, an icy rigidity takes over my body.

'I bet you did,' says your lover, a squeeze. The buzzer goes off- saying no. My muscles tense as they do before a kill just for show that I could- Kill is okay to this world- yet saying- Fuck is not- and ripping her heart out is okay too? Yet some light sex is not I asked- they were like shocked by that one- something I should not have questioned… why? When I speak, my voice seems to have gone up an octave. 'I swore I would do this and not be right.' They all gapped- like I should not have… why? It’s

not the 1900’s anymore or the 2000s- get what I mean- I said to them in my mind- they said to drop it. As we cut to a break.

Talk about this perfect love you have with him? His eyes, his face, his body… and nothing else… do not say what you feel I said in my mind? They did not like that… I was not whining points for saying what I wanted and that was a boy banging me in the night- as a real girl would do. Pissed- I shyly get up that what they want a shy girl with a fake small on her face- 'Sorry we're out of time, yet that is me- Likewise, come on here…

What do you want to see? I asked- on break…

Death?

Lust?

Killing?

Or me?

Where are my Life and Love- come in- it is all for you, and I feel cheated- and then they said remember who you are a nine-year star…Your dead to us either way.

They make me not me… just a program of what they want.

A heel like applause continues long after I am seated back with the others. I looked at Sani for comfort, and she looked at me like what. He gives me a side thumb as I walk to him. Sani is a boy that makes sure I do not F- it up. What happens to be sweet? I said I just did not feel like it

today… Hello- I am a NINE-YEAR-OLD- girl! I feel like crying!

Best of luck, Elody Elizabeth Elosteen, the star girl from region 14.'

28

I am still in a daze… sitting through his interview. He has the audience from the get they not sure about him like- go, though; I can hear them laughing at him for not having just one girl, shouting out. He got the same question and went into detail about how he banged this girl- and that was okay for he is a boy… and boys can have sex with anyone and that a-okay- yet a girl is a slut- if she thinks about it.

No respect for girls at all in the tournament. Or in our lives as girls! I knew he had to say this, yet I was not content.

A shake of his head said to me to not- think about it, I was turned off to him, so I would not talk for him… There must be some special girl, right? Come on, what's her name?' says the man in black- Um- she over there he points.

Sounds of understanding from the crowd-

Why her…?

29

'I know, Likewise, none of the boys like her for who she is,' he says. 'So, here's what you do. You win, you go home. She

may not be there or the other way around?' The man said discouragingly. I- I- a – do not know… oh my…!

For a moment, the cameras hold him down, casting on his eyes as what he says sinks in. Then I can see my face, mouth half-open in a mixture of surprise and complaint, overblown on every screen as I realize, me… He means me… right? I press my lips together and stare at the floor, hoping this will conceal the emotions starting to boil up inside of me. I never knew at that time… the girl that was shown and since I would not look up, they never said. That was the punishment- with my head in my mind.

30

I take a shower and scrub the gold paint, the makeup, the scent of beauty from my body. All that remains of the design team's efforts are the flames on my nails. I strip all that is fake and gay to me of my body rapping all the places- that you should not see- yet you do. Brush my teeth- hair- and the underwire is put on with PJs until bedtime… as I slip out… I do some reading- and see the news that I do not want to see about everything and the world all crazy. I see the hell that we live in, and I do not want to, yet they make me. There is only one hour there not feeling the inside of me- or hearing my every emotion.

It will give me something to hold on to in the days to come. I pull on a thick,

fleecy nightgown and climb into bed. It takes me about five seconds to realize I will never fall asleep.

-And-

I need sleep very much, because in the arena every moment I give in to fatigue will be an invitation to death. It is no good. One hour, two, three passes, and my eyelids refuse to get heavy. I cannot stop trying to imagine exactly what terrain I will be thrown into.

Return…? Marsh…?

A frigid inhospitable-surroundings…?

I am hoping for trees, which may afford me some means of concealment and

food, and shelter. Often- there are trees, for the cause that barren landscapes are dull glum yet awe-inspiring- and the Tournament resolves too quickly without them. On the other hand, what will the climate be like?

Questioned- What traps have the Tournament makers had burrowed to liven up the slower moments? As well as then there are my fellow esteems.

The more anxious I am to find sleep, the more it eludes me. Finally, I am too restless to even stay in bed. I pace the floor, heart beating too fast, breathing hard- yet not holding it in. My room feels like a prison cell to me as I said. Worse than what I know she had- yet not at all. It is all in my mind. That is spooky!

The idea of being strong for someone else has never entered their heads, I find myself in the position of having to console them. Since I am the person going in to be slaughtered, this is annoying.

I ran down the hall saying, I had enough- to the door- to the roof- I went not allowed- Likewise, I am there. It is not only unlocked Likewise, ajar so how is going to stop me- I see them adding traps and things out for us- they will not know I was on my time. Something that they never thought of is how I paled all this on my time to win.

The plan that they cannot get into- for I have it coded something my dad made for us when this was added in me- he said they do not need to know all your life. My

dad was somewhat of an inventor- also on this site as a hobby.

Yet there is a lot of chatting here- nothing is far in the tournament- we all play dirty- there are no roles just kill- the one you see and knock them out! My sisters are the ones that worked for this moment not me- so what was it I got from her the day I left home this code of how to do this… just by putting my forehead to hers and scanning it all in. I want to see the sky and how the day is going to go and so on- the moon with the stars- on the last night that no one will be hunting me- that is why I know where I am.

Like a compass, all I must do is look at the time on my hand to get north now.

I knew that all I needed was the pace of my hair with a magnetically charged paperclip and I had the same thing, something I ripped off one of the desks. Along with other trivial things like a flint rock and the back of my knife. Smock you die for them seeing you- yet you can live without it in the bush. The first thing you need is water- not killing… I know this they do not. Food

I was good for three weeks…

I will find what I can, yet I know there is not much out there. You kill the tournament, and you are going to be eaten by them at night. Your scent will kill you fast in the bush then hunt you. A tree living it is not working for me- yet some say they think

that would work- I say no- two words- BIG cats. We are not at the top of the food chain here- replaying is something I need to know- she did- I did not Likewise, I have it all! Everything I need to know… for that, I will always be edited. And I think- some knew this and that is why she is where she is… Likewise, they had to see if I would make it. The what-if…!

My thoughts- You know, you could live a thousand lifetimes and not deserve him. My nightmares are usually about losing you. I am okay once I realize you are here. I realize only one person will be damaged beyond repair if he dies is- me! I'm so sorry,' I whisper. I lean forward and kiss him. I turn and put my lips close to him and drop

my eyelids in imitation... 'He offered me sugar and wanted to know all my secrets,' I say in my best seductive voice. His eyelashes flutter and he look at me through a haze of opiates.

'Though you'd be gone by now,' he says. He tilts his forehead down to rest against mine and pulls me closer. His skin, his whole being radiates heat from being so near the fire, and I close my eyes, soaking in his warmth. I breathe in the smell of snow dampened leather and smoke and apples, the smell of all those wintry days we shared before the Tournament. I do not try to move away.

Why should I anyway? His voice drops to a whisper. 'I love you.' That is why.

I look at him and he gives me a sad smile. I hear all their voices. 'You could do a lot worse.' At this moment, it is impossible to imagine how I could do any better. The gift... it is perfect. So, when I rise on my tiptoe to kiss him, it does not seem forced at all.

My choices are simple. I can die like a quarry in the woods, or I can die here beside you no, then, or forever. 'I'm not going anywhere. I'm going to stay right here- even if I am not there I am in your mind and memory forever.' Always!

Always you…

Stars

31

You- I would fight for… he said to me… I wish I could freeze that moment, right here, right now, and live in it forever.'

Because I am selfish, I am a coward, I am the kind of girl who, when she might be of use, would run to stay alive and leave those who could not follow to suffer and die. There is nothing up there for me. Likewise, stars and the moon, that is all I need to see, and the treetops. I am sure they see me, yet I am on my time… My feet move soundlessly across.

'It is not always that I can turn my mind off,' I say- when I hear it snap in my mind and I walk back in and hear my boy's voice play softly inside. 'Thinking about your family, he said?' he asks. Why would you ask

me that- I said frantically question if I said far too much in my retrieving?

'No,' I admit a bit guilty. 'All I can do is wonder about tomorrow. Which is pointless, of course.' In the light from below, I can see his face now, the awkward way he holds his bandaged hands. 'I am sorry about your hands.' 'It doesn't matter, you were off for a long time, it seemed to me,' he says. 'I have never- ever been a contender in these stars nevertheless.' Why did you ask me… anyways…?

I want to die as myself, to not have them plan that too, yet this is all part of their tournament.

There were just moments where I thought you were far out there in your

thoughts or so they said too. Yet it was like you just blacked out. (That's what I wanted them to think. overloading everything this is in my mind.) My best hope is to not humiliate myself over this… and. 'He hesitates, all the time I said too much… like I was a thief to something- taking it away from him… and got away with it- as I did then I knew I could not say anything to him, or they would surely get it… so wrong right?

'And what do you know, maybe I did blackout?' I speak. 'I don't know how to say it exactly. How I feel about all this- my family is grown now- I no! Only me and you- you must take this place and be there for me- that is what I need from you.

Does that make any sense to you? I ask… I shake my head, yes and he gets it, all we have at this point is each other as we hug our own body’s feel like we are hugging. How could he die like anyone Likewise, himself or as me with him- or them?

'I don't want them to change me… from the inside out. Turn me into horrid kill, which I'm not wanting to be.'

I bite my lip feeling inferior… like always in my past days of days and times. While I have been ruminating on the availability of trees and looking for love to show the way that he has been struggling with how to maintain his identity as us. His

purity for me is what is driving me to keep going.

I feel you! All of you now and forever! He spoke.

32

I locked my blue eyes into him, demanding an answer- do you love me?

Yes- truly! He said- I knew in his thought that was real.

I smiled at him, sad and thrilled. Okay, be my sweetheart and kiss me on the rooftop under the stars. And we ran and did just that not caring what they said.

I will always- Then I turn and leave the roof. I spend the rest of the night

slipping in and out of a dozing out, imagining the cutting remarks I will make on him to kill him out of the fact I have to in the morning of the next day. I do not want to kill this boy… I love him… cannot they see that- it is sick to me and him?

~*~

There are no rules in the arena, Likewise, anthropophagy does not play well with the Capitol audience, so they tried to head it off. Just KILL! And see who stands as last- there is no timing- it could be one day or one year. It has happened.

33

The ride to me I might as well have been in a coffin lasts about half an hour

before the windows blackout, suggesting that we are nearing the arena.

The flying ships overhand the lands of Zarnesboro, and I go back to the ranking, only this time it leads down into a cylinder subversive, into the catacombs that lie beneath the arena. That is where it all opened to the world, they made for us- it is part of the land yet under them workings… up and you are over the arced fizz of a web almost virtual programmed control-ness.

The whole thing is a brand- new to me- all- everything- the land and how it looks the sent and the air seeming thinner, a fast train moved over my head, and with clear like tracks under it with care posts

under. Fans, I would say that they want to see all this for the stadium.

The only thing the same is the faces popping up with the look of kill coming at me- there is no call out when these stars pop up and run.

34

I struggle to keep my breakfast down. We are on a flat, open stretch of ground. A plain of hard- a death that is complained to look at if you can slow down to see if- it has made to be that way for a tea's- lush Pandora is the fifth moon of the gas giant Polyphemus (both are figures in Greek mythology), which orbits Alpha Centauri A in the Alpha Centauri star system, the closest star system to our sun.

Everything glassines at the light in colors you have never seen before with your eyes.

'Why not? You saved me with those bugs. You are smart enough to still be alive. And I cannot seem to shake you anyway,' I say. She blinks at me, trying to decide. 'You hungry?' I can see her swallow hard, her eyes flickering to the meat. 'Come on then, I've had two kills today.' Hallie tentatively steps out into the open. 'I can fix your stings.' 'Can you?' I ask. 'How?' She digs in the pack she carries and pulls out a handful of leaves. I am almost certain they are the ones my mother uses.

'Where'd you find those?'

'Just around. We all carry them when we work in the orchards. They left a

lot of nests there,' says Leah. 'There is a lot here, too.'

'That's right. You are Area Eleven. Cultivation,' I say. 'Orchards, huh? That must be how you can fly around the trees like you've got wings.' Hallie smiles. I have landed on one of the few things she will admit pride in. 'Well, come on, then, fix me up.'

I plunk down by the fire and roll up my pant leg to reveal the sting on my knee. To my surprise, permitted places the handful of leaves into her mouth and begins to chew them. My mother would use other methods, Likewise, it is not like we have a lot of options. After a minute or so, Hallie

presses a gloppy green wad of chewed leaves and spit on my knee.

'Oh-wa.' The sound comes out of my mouth before I can stop it. It is as if the leaves are leaching the pain right out of the sting.

Hallie giggles. 'Lucky you had the sense to pull the stingers out or you'd be a lot worse.' 'Do my neck! Do my cheek!' I almost beg.

Hallie stuff another handful of leaves in her mouth, and soon I am laughing, because the relief is so sweet. I notice a long burn on Hallie’s forearm. 'I've got something for that.' I set aside my weapons and anointed her arm with the burning medicine.

'You have good guarantors,' she says longingly. 'You weren't joking, about wanting me for an ally?' she asks. 'Have you gotten anything yet?' I asked. She shakes her head- no.

'You will, though- watch. The closer we get to the end; the more people will realize how ingenious you are.' I turn the meat over. 'No, I meant it,' I say. I can almost hear Sam- groaning as I team up with this wispy child. Likewise, I want her. Because she is a survivor, and I trust her, and why not admit it? She reminds me of my sister.

'Okay,' she says, and holds out her hand. We shake. 'It's a deal.' Of course, this kind of deal can only be temporary,

Likewise, neither of us mentions that. She says sometimes a flock will wander into the orchard and they get a decent lunch that day. For a while, all conversation stops as we fill our stomachs. Gosling has a delicious meal that is so fatty, the grease drips down your face when you bite into it. permitted is a big handful of some starchy roots to the meal. Roasted over the fire, they have the sharp sweet taste of a parsnip. She recognizes the bird, too, some wild thing they call a gosling in her district.

'Oh,' says permitted with a sigh. 'I've never had a whole leg to myself before.' I will bet she has not. I will bet meat hardly ever comes her way. 'Take the other,' I say.

'Categorically?'

'Take whatever you want. Now that I have a bow and arrows, I can get more. Plus, I have snares. I can show you how to set them,' I say. permitted still looks uncertainty at the leg. 'Oh, take it,' I say, putting the drumstick in her hands. 'It will only keep a few days anyway, and we've got the whole bird plus the rabbit.' Once she has hold of it, her appetite wins out and she takes a huge mouthful.

Her eyes widened. 'Oh, no, we're not allowed to eat the crops.' 'I'd have thought, in area 11, you'd have a bit more to eat than us. You know, since you grow the food,' I say. 'They arrest you or something?' I asked.

'They whip you and make everyone else watch,' says Leah. 'The mayor's extremely strict about it.'

As well, our mayor, Madge's father, does not seem to have much taste for such events. Maybe being the least prestigious, poorest, most laugh at the community in the country has its advantages. Such as, being ignored by the Capitol if we produce our coal quotas.

I can tell by her expression that it is not that uncommon an occurrence. A public whipping a rare thing in quarter 14, although occasionally one occurs. Technically, Hallie and I could be whipped daily for poaching in the woods- well,

technically, we could get a whole lot worse-except all the officials buy our meat.

'Do you get all the coal you want?' she asks.

'No,' I answer. 'Just what we buy and whatever we track in on our boots.'

It is enigmatic, my sisterly, and terrifying. Even from orbit, the scope of flora present on the surface designates a moon brimming with life. They added more moons just to play with us, yet I know the Earth one.

Other than the richness of varying colors, the trees resemble those of Earth. They have familiar trunks, branches, and leaves, though due to the difference in

gravity, many of the shapes appear strange to humans and the proportions are greater because of the lower gravity. The trees and plant life of Zansboro have formed links to the mental connections between their roots that link us to the troopers and effectively act as neurons, creating a moon-wide 'brain' that has been achieved by the chip.

Larger than Earth it feels- this is like a tournament where you are the fighter lost in the world that made- it is not a real place to others- yet we have heard about it- like a stadium- out in this world. With what I would call a wraparound screen that never- where you can see things they say and want you to do- was it never- ever seem to end- where you are all lost within- where you feel

this is all real- yet the bloodshed is for actual.

You are just one small pixel in a big sea of gaming and entertainment. Looks like a lush paradise standard during the day, Likewise, at night, virtually all life on the moon exhibits bioluminescent qualities in various shades of blue, purple, and green, which provides them better camouflage at night on Zarnsboro. I can see nothing, after running fast and far I run to a steep downward slope or even cliff. To my right lies a lake. To my left and back, sparse piney woods.

Run- run- run… for what I thought was forever.

I hear his instructions in my head. 'Just clear out, put as much distance as you can between yourselves and the others, and find a source of water also now I need to clean it.'

I heard in my mind Jump- I am near to you… so I went into the water I wanted. Swimming over I stopped, and made a fire, I had to do it now night and drop off down to 32° when just five or so minutes ago it was 99° Fahrenheit. I see him running for me- the lip was made- over the high falls- where a wolf was chasing him- that did not make the jump.

35

Zoie- 'I once told you- if one gets out it’s a victory'

Elody- She said that to me also when I said how do I go or getaway. So-o in other words, we all could die, and no one would give a shit.

Nevertheless, it is tempting, so tempting when I see the bounty waiting there before me. And I know that if I do not get it, someone else will. That the Career tries Likewise, who survive the bloodbath will divide up most of these life-sustaining spoils. Something catches my eye. There, resting on a mound of blanket rolls is a silver sheath of arrows and a bow, already strung, just waiting to be engaged. That is mine, I think. It is meant for me.

I am fast… I can sprint faster than any of the girls in our school although a

couple can beat me in distance races. Likewise, this forty-yard length is what I am built for. I know I can get it; I know I can reach it first, Likewise, then the question is how quickly can I get out of there? By the time I have scrambled up the packs and grabbed the weapons, others will have reached the horn, and one or two I might be able to pick off. Likewise, say there's a dozen, at that close range, they could take me down with the spears and the clubs. Or their powerful fists.

The hijacking I call it- Before the tournament, some tried to run get a train that was passing in the night- others- I remember and had playing in my mind the one that ran- that tried escaping on the rail

line. What they did was tunnel their way out- making a hole in the boxcar, and dripping their body down on the ties, feet dragging on and the cars would all pass Likewise, the last was they had to roll over the tracks in-between the wheels. In the car Jarrah- said let us see that rope- the rope is something we all have it is so needed. Even if just one of these bracelets… cute the girl said when she was trying to strangle another girl out like she was a guard… on the top of the tram… Do you have a better plane than a girl? Yes- let us see the rope- it went around her neck as he made two notes- there the notes there smash the joints in nick- dead in 15 seconds. They did it; they killed all the troopers on top of the train- and made the drive or the train go an

alternative way off to freedom or so they thought.

Over the tallest viaduct in the world 3,000 feet (about the height of the Burj Khalifa, the tallest building in the world) in the air- they got rid of all the bodies… the one boy rolling his eyes was not their uniform, like the rest of them that could. Planes were flown into bomb or gunned down the runners as they went for a small-town call Knox in Italy for freedom on the Kane line bypass. They fired back Likewise; it was 100 of them over 3,000 of them.

~*~

Rip out of my thought- Get the weapon he said- that was the next part making it to where they have my stuff. And

that was 5,280 feet (about half the height of Mount St. Helens) always. From the starting line. Where we all must meet up- yet that the tournament- no we must get this with them about to kill with bare hands. The very weapon that might be my salvation, I have small hands- I no- yet with her past training in my mind I have the power. And with this rope I killed my first eight-year-old girl- that was looking at me for trust- I lied saying I would not do that to her- yet this is a tournament of life or death, not trust- she was going to kill me- remember that… did I want to NO- did I have to yes. She was so cute- I made sure that she remembered… giving her the moment in my mind that played in all the minds around in the land

that I made the kill- a sacrifice of life so we can live.

(Thank you for your blood- and breath- no it mine to have. Not- forgotten, the crowd makes their hand movement- like a wave then placing it on their heart and kissing her goodbye. These are what area doses are anyway.) We will not peace here not fighting yet some parts are an uprising, and that where you get wiped off the planet.

And I only see one bow on her, and I get it- yet I can do that as I make my way to the point, of the Hallie first phase- of this long-drawn-out tournament- I know the minute must be up for me to get what I want from her and will have to decide what my

strategy will be, right to make- to get there I am off my path now

I know after fighting this girl off me… running and playing cat and mouse with her… and I find myself positioning my feet to run, not away into the stir rounding forests toward the falls, I hope that is right to get back to where I started.

Yet, I know I will run into all of them that may have their shit now- so what do- I do- run without? I also have now a small thumb handgun, pink with a white grip- something I keep from her forever, I knew if I win that would be something I would treasure- I undressed her seeing what I could find- it what you do when you get a kill- down in her undies in the front was this

gun, deep up in her vajayjay the hand was out some point downward, and I tore it out and now have it in my handbag- good hiding spot why didn't I think of that? And one round in the gun. I wonder if that is meant for my head.

Is it a choice, no? She did care if it went off inside her, why would she? So, you pack things where you have the holes… on the thing, girls have over the boys. Now I need a knife to see what shoved up their guts for that end- we- no. I know they have this investigated- yet if you have the money, you can pack hidden things like that there… I do not have the money. A hidden gun in the puss- puss- they all say wow or something like that- they went nuts at how

clever that was- the reporter said- not good enough if you cannot fire it the man said on the screen, or the other girl would have been dead. How that girl is living is hard for me to get… to John Sha-Long to Steven Hung-dong. We like that girl; didn't we say Steven a real cutie- what was her last name Hard-cock? No- Sharcock- yah that it- Yah-ha Sharcock- she was a cute one with a drack, yet some rosy-shock look to her hair in the sunlight- and green eyes- not blue- and so not brown like the others. With a thin look.

I know I must kill a weak girl to get more. That is the next one, I am weak. I know it is killing this young girl, I never thought I would be able to do such a thing.

When suddenly I notice my boy on his way, he is about five-run boys look for what I am, the shit we need- to not die- to my right I see one wanting to jump me, and he did- my boy slit his hand off- quite a fair distance I see more, still I can tell he is looking at me or my man, and I think he might be shaking his head at what my man did for me- after killing the other girl they may have liked before all this took place.

The one he wanted- if he wins… Likewise, the suns in my eyes and I see nothing Likewise, - my man loving eyes in mine I feel safe if only for that moment and the moment was gone too fast, and while I am perplexing over it the gong rings out. I was no at this point given his ring-

something he said I need to prove to him, and what I said to him also- and that was killing a child- to show that would never betray one- another and the other way around- we killed each other now- where have the promise- a band to show for it. it mine must rock hearts in it with our names- and it is gold, he is just a gold band with our names. Yong, I went like a woman now- yet I have not even had my first period, and they are making that happen tonight. Like all the other girls- to be as they call it far- in a tournament that is not.

More blood funny, no?

36

And I have missed the rounds to my heart and hand! I have missed it by not much!

Because that extra couple of seconds, I have lost by seeing my dream of living in the days to come- by not being ready… for all this… I need to eat… so I grab him, and we both shuffle our feet for a moment, confused at the direction my brain wants to take… of what is next, and then he swipes me off my forward in his arms, tucking the sheet of plastic and a loaf of bread that was tucked in my top I eat as he runs in the woods, and I feed him some to bits and pieces.

The pickings are so small, and I am so angry with my boy for distracting me that

I sprint in twenty yards to retrieve a bright orange backpack that could hold anything because I cannot stand living with anything.

A boy, I think from Area 9, reaches the pack at the same time I do and for a brief time we grapple with it and then he coughs, splattering my face with blood.

I stagger back, repulsed by the warm, sticky spray. Then the boy slips to the ground. That is when I see the knife in his back. Already others- Likewise, have reached Cornucopia and are spreading out to attack.

Yes, the girl from Area 2, ten yards away, running toward me, one hand clutching a half-dozen knives. I have seen her

throw in training. She never misses. And I am her next target.

I was right they now have more than me… what to do… All the general fear I have been feeling condenses into an immediate fear of this girl, this predator who might kill me in seconds.

Arena shoots through me and I sling the pack over one shoulder and run full speed for the woods. I can hear the blade whistling toward me and reflexively hike the pack up to protect my head.

The blade lodges in the pack. Both straps on my shoulders now, I make for the trees. Somehow, I know the girl will not pursue me. That she will be drawn back into the Cornucopia before all the good stuff is

gone. A grin crosses my face. Thanks for the knife, I think.

At the edge of the woods, I turn for one instant to survey the field. About a dozen or so try Likewise, are riding out away at one another at the horn. Several lie dead already on the ground.

Those who have taken flight are disappearing into the trees or the void opposite me. I continue running until the woods have hidden me from the other try Likewise, then slow into a steady jog that I think I can maintain for a while. For the next few hours, I alternated between jogging and walking, putting as much distance as I could between myself and my competitors. I lost my bread during the

struggle with the boy from Community 7 Likewise, managed to stuff my plastic in my sleeve, and so as I walk, I fold it effortlessly and tuck it into a pocket.

I also free the knife- it is a fine one with a long sharp blade, saw-like near the handle, which will make it handy for sawing through things- and slide it into my belt.

I do not dare stop observing the contents of the pack yet. I just keep moving, pausing only to check for pursuers.

I can go for a long time. I know that from my days in the woods.

Nevertheless, I will need water. Instruction in my mind was given, and since I botched the first, I keep a sharp eye out

for any sign of it. No luck… I have other than his love.

The woods begin to evolve, and the pines are intermixed with a diversity of trees, some I identified, some completely foreign to me. At one point, I heard a noise and pulled out my knife, thinking I may have to defend myself. Likewise, I have only startled a rabbit- that I got my using an aero.

'Good to see you,' I whispered… If there is one rabbit, there could be hundreds just waiting to be snared.

The ground declines down some as you can see here. I do not particularly like this too much. Gorges make me feel trapped as I look up at the viaduct and nowhere, I

am now at or so I think. I want to be high, like in the hills around Area 14, where I can see my rivals' forthcoming.

However, I have no choice. Likewise, to keep going running like hillbilly-hell.

Funny though, I do not feel too bad.

The days of guzzling with a coffin paid off. I have staying power even though I am short on sleep. I feel him going in and out on me too in my mind. Being in the woods is refreshing. I am glad for the loneliness, even though it is a misapprehension, because I am on-screen right now.

It is not looking cute Likewise, yet sweet to them looking at how to sleep the little one is… the joke made about tucking me and giving me a bedtime story.

Not unswervingly Likewise, off and on. There are so many decreases to show the first day, down to 60- that honor for the stars still standing- hiking through the woods is not much to look at in the day Likewise, at night it is woo- wah.

Even so, they will show me enough to let individuals know I am alive, intact, and on the trip. One of the substantial days of betting is the opening when the initial wounded come in. Conversely, that cannot compare to what happens as the field shrinks to a handful of players.

It is late-night and the ground is a wondrous sight when I begin to hear the cannons. Each shot represents a dead try Likewise. The fighting must have finally stopped at Cornucopia. They never- ever assemble the massacre bodies until the killers have isolated.

On an opening day, they do not even fire the cannons until the initial fighting's over for the motive that it is too hard to keep track of the death toll.

I allow myself to pause, panting, wheezing, and puffing as I count the shots.

One, two, and three… on and on until they reach eleven. Eleven dead in all 59 stands. All the names I could care less about there just kill me… My fingernails

scraped at the dried blood the boy from Area 5 coughed into my face. I got him some on the hand too. He is gone, certainly. I wonder about him and where he is off too, I can hear him yet not see.

Has he lasted through the day at least I knew that? I well known in a few hours what next- if there are any more surprises, they made up fast for us to endure as they did with having wild wolves after us… and big cats. I knew I had to find a place to sleep that would be safe in an open field with a ring of fire around me- that would keep everything away, no? If I am the one inside feeding the flames- I knew not for long yet I needed some shuteye. Some are in caves- yet I do not want their batshit virus.

No thanks… When they hologram the dead's images into the sky for the rest of us to see, and on our bracelets…

He had no confidence he could win.

And I will not end up with the unpleasant task of killing him. It is better if he is out of this for good, I do not know all I know is this is killing me too.

I got to the point where I got my gear… all the things that were my dad’s or passed in the family down for this moment. There was a lockbox that I had to crack also… just part of the tournament to them, as you have some kid breathing down your neck, wanting to kill you- I was playing with the combo.

One eye on the lock and one-off to all the other sides, I was frantic… yet the combo was my great granddad's ID number- something that was deep in my mind that I knew I had. I tried all the family members, and that one worked, there was one can of dog food too- yet I know I will eat anything… that is what they gave me… to live on. Comparable to a mutt…?

I slump down next to my backpack, dog- tired- with the meat of three of them…

I will eat anything… I need to go through it anyway before night falls. See what I must work with. As I unhook the straps, I can feel it has sturdily made although an unfortunate color. This orange will practically glow in the dark. I made a

mental note to camouflage it first thing tomorrow.

I flip open the flap. What I want most, right at this moment, is water. A girl that wanted to play nice directive to immediately find water was not arbitrary- I was going to do the same play nice until they turned on one another.

I will not last long without it, and she knows the way or so I will trust. It may be a trap- yet I go for it- the thought in my mind said she okay- I will be there too.

It is a trap- I see 10 run up on me and I load the gun- popping them all off in the head, her first, stopping to reload the gun with black powder, the last one I saw her eye color she was that close. Yet I got

them all… the knives that were thrown at me not all missing me, the arrows flying past, yet I dodge them as I am behind a tree.

49- I see all of them that have passed by my hands- I was happy- and rewarded for my bravery. They added metal to my uniform sent in by the unmanned drone of a bluebird square under it are pin-like things hanging out of all that I killed off with their colors. I have 14 deaths now- that I have claimed, all the names I do not even know- nor did they know me or do anything to me for them to pass on.

The number went down more- as the update went up to 20 kids. 15 boys and 5 girls… with me included.

Now the real tournament starts to me- as the blood drips from my teeth I giggled crazily… wanting to win this no matter what! Ha- ha I can do this- as I rip the raw meet with my k-9-teeth that I shared with a fingernail fill, that I found in one of the girl’s handbags, I have all these things now that I want the rest, I let behind with their naked bodies- for something to find and eat.

I killed boys- I never thought they all would be so different… and something I would not understand. Yet I had to do it! I used them… and I got them to fall for me in every way I could. It is all part of the star tournament for a girl!

37

For a few days, I will be able to function with unpleasant symptoms of dehydration and the runs. Likewise, after that I will deteriorate into helplessness and be dead in a week, tops. I carefully laid out the provisions and flamed what I could. I am down to 60 pounds. It has been three weeks now… my mind is spinning with what if. He is a week somewhere… lost he would not say… all I heard was go one and do this.

Nothing to sleep on Likewise, the ground and piled up pin tree limbs.

The bottle- the water of another girl, that I am not sure about, I added bleach I found of another dead boy body 16 drops, and I can, have it? I was out at this point- running and always moving in the

night- and the day resting some… if they are asleep like the animals that are when I move. And pop them in the head will they dream of banging me off. I got one last night that way and it feels so-o good!

I got his tighties underwire and made a white flag out of them hanging now on a stick, for them all to see on the screen of his giving up, that was an easy kill to make… and I wanted to be a dick about it… for he did not have much of one. I would no… my boy is the man here! I hope he is all good.

I became aware of the dryness in my throat and mouth, the cracks in my lips. I have been moving all day long. It has been hot, and I have sweated a lot and I know

that is not good. Yet that is not stopping the boys from making their way at me… I can fight all of them all- I thought, or can I?

38

As I refill my pack, I have an awful thought. The lake, I have made it there- over high wood rope passageways and train, replying down the sides of rock faces, I did it all, The Kamahi Lake is a full day's journey from where I sit now, a much harder journey with nothing to drink for you can drink this with all that is in it. And then, even if I reach it, it is sure to be heavily guarded by some of the Career stars.

I am about to panic when I remember the rabbit I got earlier today. It must drink, too, or I must eat it without-

cocking. I just must find out where- he is… that is all I can think about at this point is him.

4 weeks now- Dusk is closing in and I am ill at ease. The trees are too thin to offer much camouflage. The layer of pine needles that muffles my footsteps also makes tracking animals harder when I need their trails to find water. And I am still heading downhill, deeper, and deeper into a valley that seems endless, my dress looks like Swiss cheese at this point all dirty and such, no underwear at this point it was used as cordage. Like my shoestrings…

I am hungry, too, Likewise, I do not dare break into my precious store of crackers and beef yet. Instead, I take my

knife and go to work on a pine tree, cutting away the outer bark and scraping off a large handful of the softer inner bark. I slowly chew the stuff as I walk along. After a week of the finest food in the world, it is a little hard to choke down. Then I have eaten plenty of pine in my life. I will adjust quickly and do not think about it.

In another hour, it is clear I must find a place to camp yet again. Night creatures are coming out and up inside my girlie-ness gross. I can hear the infrequent hoot or howl; my first clue is that I will be competing with natural predators for rabbits. As to whether I will be viewed as a source of food, it is too soon to tell. There

could be any number of animals pestering me at this instant.

Nonetheless, right now, I decided to make my fellow stars a priority. I am sure many will continue hunting through the night.

Those who fought it out at the lavishness will have food, an abundance of water from the lake, torches or flashlights, and weapons they are itching to use. I can only hope I have travelled far and fast enough to be out of choice.

Before settling down, I take my wire and set two twitch-up snares in the brush. I know it is risky to be setting traps, Likewise, food will go so fast out here. And I cannot

set snares on the run. Still, I walk another five minutes before making camp.

I pick my tree carefully, a willow, not tall Likewise, set in a clump of other willows, and camouflage in those long, flowing tresses. I hiked up, sticking to the stronger branches close to the trunk, and found a sturdy fork for my bed. It takes some doing, then again, I arrange the sleeping bag in a comfortable manner. I found the bag of one of the girls I killed number 2 on my line up.

I am small enough to tuck the top of the bag over my head, Likewise, I put on my hood as well. As night falls, the air cools quickly. In the face of the risk, I took in getting the backpack, I know now it was the

right choice. It is all about choosing what you pick. What would you do like me?

I place my backpack at the foot of the bag, then slide in after it. As a precaution, I remove my belt, loop it around the division and my sleeping bag, and refasten it at my waist. Now if I roll over in my sleep, I will not go crashing to the earth.

Nightfall has just come when I hear the anthem that precedes the death summary. Through the branches, I can see the seal of the Capitol, which appears to be floating in the atmosphere.

I am viewing another screen, an enormous one that is transported by one of their disappearing hovercrafts.

This sleeping bag, radiating back and preserving my body heat, will be energetic.

I am sure there are several other stars whose major anxiety right now is how to stay warm whereas I may be able to get a few hours of sleep.

If only I was not so desired of all that is life.

The anthem fades out and the sky goes dark for a moment. At home, we would be watching full coverage of every killing, Likewise, that is thought to give a one-sided gain to the living others.

Likewise, now instead of scores, they post only community numbers. I take a

deep breath as the face of the all-dead kids begin and tick them off one by one on my fingers.

For the occasion, if I got my hands on the bow and shot someone, my secret would be revealed to all. No, here in the arena, all we see is the same snapshot they showed when they televised our training scores. Simple headshots. Yet this time with a star saying they have fallen.

39

The first to see is the girl from Borough 2. That means that the career stars from 1 and 2 have all endured. No astonishment there. Then the boy from 3, I did not presume that one, usually all the vocations make it through the first day. The

boy from Community 3. The scary-faced girl made it. Both try Likewise, between 4 and 7. The boy from 8. From 10. Yes, there is the boy who I fought for the backpack. I have run through my fingers, only one deader try... Likewise, to go. Is it him? No, there is the girl from borough 12. That is, it, the Capitol closure is back with a final musical exaggeration. Then obscurity and the sounds of the timberland pick up where it left off.

I am thankful my man is still flourishing and not dead or messed up in the head. I tell myself again that if I get killed, his winning will be a big advantage to his mother the most, for he is a lot like me. This is what I tell myself to clarify the self-

contradictory sentiments, which ascend when I think of him all the time. When I am not with him, I touch myself like I want him to touch me.

I think of you…

The gratitude that he gave me an edge by professing his love for me in the interview. The dread that we may come face-to-face at any moment in this arena. I know what I may have to do… Yet I will not and never will him even if we hear them say someone KILL- KILL- KILL.

5 not dead, Likewise, none from Area 14. I try to work out who is left. A bonnie boy made it through the first day. I cannot help feeling glad. That makes ten of us. The other three I will figure out

tomorrow. Now when it is dark, and I have traveled far, and I am nestled high in this tree, now I must try and rest. I know this is good enough for now.

I have not slept in four days, and then there has been a long day's voyage into the arena. Gradually, I allow my muscles to reduce. My eyes close… The last thing I think is it is fortunate I do not snore or at least he never said that I did. I was on top of him in the tree, all snuggled.

Spur-of-the-moment! The sound of a breaking branch wakes me yet not him. I shake him up- how long have I been asleep? Four hours? Five- nine hours- too long?

Yet we had lots of covers up there 500 feet in the air.

The tip of my nose is icy cold- yet I kiss him, and kip rubs my nose- and the heat of our body is keeping the child down. Break! Snap! This is not the sound of a branch under our feet, Likewise, the sharp crack of one coming from a tree. Crack! Snap! I judge it to be several hundred yards to my right. Leisurely, without a sound, I turn myself on that route. For a few minutes, there is nothing Likewise, darkness and some come to blows. Then I see a flash and a small fire begins to bloom. A pair of hands warm over flames, Likewise, I cannot make out more than that yet- moving fast like.

I must bite my lip not to scream every foul name, and I know at the fire

maze. What are they thinking? He asked me to hold him in his arms as we got off and he leans in for the kiss and I met that the rest of the way?

A fire just at nightfall would have been one thing. Those who battled at the profusion, with their superior strength and surplus of supplies, could not have been near enough to spot the flames then. Likewise, then now, when they have certainly been searching the forests for hours looking for wounded or dead- the wounded are left to pass on there no help for the week. You might as well be waving a flag and shouting, 'Get me!' And here I am a stone's throw from the biggest idiot in the Tournament. Strapped in a tree. Not daring

to flee since my general location has just been broadcast to any killer who cares. I mean, I know it is cold out here and not everybody has a sleeping bag. Likewise, then again you grit your teeth and stick it out until dawn!

I lay smoldering in my bag with his naked body on top of mine, I feel his skin so smooth- for the next couple of hours thinking that if I can get off- enough even if death is nearing us both- and just one, my nature has been to flee, not fight with him caring me out of harm. A boy that is fighting for me is what I have always dreamed about more than marriage even. I have dreamed about that too. What young girl has not- it is the most important day in a girl's life- no? I

could see me with him- at the end of this now.

However, this person's a hazard. Ill-advised people are dangerous. Then this one undoubtedly does not have much in the way of guns while I have this excellent knife.

The atmosphere is still dim yet sparkly with the stars overhead all twilight, Likewise, I can feel the first signs of dawn approaching. I am an establishment to think of us- meaning the individual whose death I am now developing and me- we might have gone unnoticed. Then I heard it. numerous pairs of feet breaking into a run. The fire starter must have dozed off. They are on her formerly she can escape from. I know it is a girl now, I can tell by the pleading, the

agonized scream that follows. Then there's laughter and compliments from several voices. Someone cries out, '13- or 12 down and 11 to go no!' Yet they are so far away from us know it may be weeks where it will just be, he and I- I wonder if I will get impregnated?

I might- with all this that we are doing, I know nothing about that yet I sure I could do that, they would still not take me out of the fight, and they would still kill him off to… so he must pull out- and have it gone on my cheeks. Would you squeeze and suck my breast right here (she pointed to where she wanted him to kiss and draw in with lips.) I asked in a moment looking up at the skies.

The sighs- she cried- saying I do not want to ever leave you- wrapped around his was- still locked into him- and his love and Mr. Winky- that what I call that thing. He was kissing my neck- and I was him- I think- I got a hick-y somewhere on my collarbone it is black and blue.

And a chapped hood- from kissing it- It is love- and they are not stopping it-

NEVER- EVER! The videos we have would kick your tongue out tongue. And yes- you can see me doing that too- hold it out and show that before the goop-y was gulped hard.

After all the sex- he-a being- the sweet boy- that he is Likewise, a tampon in me. The string hanging there looked at me-

saying- if I when this I want you- if you when this would you say the same- YES! We cleaned off in the river in the moonlight- a naked swim- where the eyes were looking for you did not get to us. We run more than the others… about 10 miles. I do not feel all the cute looking like I do muddy and showing hair everywhere yet- love is love and you just do not care if it is.

40

'Why not…? You saved me with those bugs.

You are smart enough to still be alive. And I cannot seem to shake you anyway,' I say. She blinks at me, trying to decide. 'You hungry?' I can see her swallow hard, her eyes flickering to the meat. 'Come

on then, I've had two kills today.' Hallie tentatively steps out into the open. 'I can fix your stings.' 'Can you?' I ask. 'How?' She digs in the pack she carries and pulls out a handful of leaves. I am almost certain they are the ones my mother uses. 'Where'd you find those?'

'Just around. We all carry them when we work in the orchards. They left a lot of nests there,' says Leah. 'There is a lot here, too.'

'That's right. Are you part of 11? Cultivation,' I say. 'Orchards, huh? That must be how you can fly around the trees like you've got wings.' Hallie smiles. I have landed on one of the few things she will

admit pride in. 'Well, come on, then. Fix me up.'

I notice a long burn on Leah's forearm. 'I've got something for that.' I set aside my weapons and anointed her arm with the burning medicine; she stuffed another handful of leaves in her mouth, and soon I am laughing because the release is so sweet.

I plunk down by the fire and roll up my pant leg to reveal the sting on my knee. To my surprise, permitted places the handful of leaves into her mouth and begins to chew them. My mother would use other methods,

Likewise, it is not like we have a lot of options. After a minute or so, Hallie

presses a gloppy green wad of chewed leaves and spit on my knee.

'Oh.' The sound comes out of my mouth before I can stop it. It is as if the leaves are leaching the pain right out of the sting. Hallie giggles. 'Lucky you had the sense to pull the stingers out or you'd be a lot worse.' 'Do my neck…! Do my cheek…!' I am almost begging… 'You have good sponsors,' she says longingly. 'Have you gotten anything yet?' I ask. She shakes her head. 'You will, though. Watch. The closer we get to the end; the more people will realize how clever you are.' I turn the meat over.

'You weren't joking, about wanting me for an ally?' she asks. 'No, I meant it,' I

say. I can almost hear Sam- groaning as I team up with this wispy child.

Likewise, I want her. Roasted over the fire, they have the sharp sweet taste of a parsnip. She recognizes the bird, too, some wild thing they call a gosling in her district. She says sometimes a flock will wander into the orchard and they get a decent lunch that day. For a while, all conversation stops as we fill our stomachs. Gosling has a delicious meal that is so fatty, the grease drips down your face when you bite into it.

Because she is a survivor, and I trust her, and why not admit it? She reminds me of my sister. 'Okay,' she says, and holds out her hand. We shake. 'It's a deal.' Of course, this kind of deal can only

be temporary, Likewise, neither of us mentions that.

She has a big handful of starchy roots for the meal. Yet she is so nice to me I just cannot- I can put a knife in the little sweetheart. 'Oh,' she says she sighs heavily. 'I've never had a whole leg to myself before.'

I will bet she has not. I will bet meat hardly ever comes her way. 'Take the other,' I say.

'Really?' she asks.

'Take whatever you want. Now that I have a bow and arrows, I can get more. Plus, I have snares. I can show you how to set them,' I say. Hallie still looks uncertainly at the leg. 'Oh, take it,' I say, putting the

drumstick in her hands. 'It will only keep a few days anyway, and we've got the whole bird plus the rabbit.' Once she has hold of it, her appetite wins out and she takes a huge mouthful. 'I'd have thought, in Community Eleven, you'd have a bit more to eat than us.

You know, since you grow the food,' I say.

Hallie’s eyes widen big that one thing about her eyes is big. 'Oh, no, we're not allowed to eat the crops.'

'They arrest you or something?' I ask.

'They whip you and make everyone else watch-'

'The mayor's extremely strict about it.'

'Don't you have to be in school?' I ask.

'Not during harvest. Everyone works then,' she says.

It is interesting, hearing about her life.

We have so little communication with anyone outside our district. I wonder if the Tournament makers are blocking out our conversation because even though the information seems harmless, they do not want people in different districts to know about one another. The suggestion is made by her- cute- but we lay out all our food to

plan. She is seen most of me, Likewise, I add the last couple of crackers and beef strips to the pile. She has gathered quite a collection of roots, nuts, greens, and even some berries. I tentatively bite into one, and it is as good as our blackberries. Taking

Hallie on as an ally seems a better choice all the time. We divide up our food supplies, so if we are separated, we will both be set for a few days. Apart from the food, permitted has a small waterskin, a homemade slingshot, and an extra pair of socks. She also has a sharp shard of rock she uses as a knife.

I roll an unfamiliar berry in my fingers. 'You sure this is safe?' 'Oh, yes, we have them back home. I've been eating them

for days,' she says, popping a handful in her mouth. 'I know it's not much,' she says as if embarrassed, ' Likewise, I had to get away from Cornucopia fast.'

'You did exactly right,' I say. When I spread out my gear, she gasps a little when she sees the sunglasses.

'How did you get those?' she asks.

'In my pack. They have been useless so far. They don't block the sun and they make it harder to see,' I say with a shrug.

'These aren't for the sun, they're for obscurity,' cries Leah. 'Sometimes, when we harvest through the night, they'll pass out a few pairs to those of us highest in the trees. Where the torchlight does not reach. One

time, this boy Martin tried to keep his pair. Hide it in his pants. They killed him on the spot.'

'They killed a 4 boy for taking these?' I speak.

'Yes, and everyone knew he was no danger.

Martin was not right in the head. I mean, he still acted like a three-year-old. He just wanted the glasses to play with,' she said.

Hearing this makes me feel like Community 14 is some sort of haven. Of course, people keep over from starvation all the time, Likewise, I cannot imagine the Peacekeepers murdering a simple-minded

child. There is a little girl, one of the grandkids of my Grannie, who wanders around the mess-hall. She's not right, Likewise, she is treated as a sort of pet. People toss her scraps and things.

So, they are fighting in a pack. I am not flabbergasted. Often alliances are formed in the initial stages of the Playoffs. The strong band together to hunt down the weak then, when the tension becomes too great, begin to turn on one another. I do not have to wander too hard who has made this alliance. It will be the remaining

Career stars from constituencies 1, 2, and 6. Two boys and three girls. The ones who launched together.

For a moment, I heard them read the girl for supplies. I can tell by their comments they have found nonentity good. I phenomenon if the victim is Hallie Likewise, quickly dismissing the thought.

She is much too bright to be building a fire like that.

'Better clear out so they can get the body before it starts stinking.' I am almost certain that the British boy from quarter 2. There are buzzes of assent and then, to my horror, I hear the pack heading toward me.

They do not know I am here. How could they? And I am well concealed in the clump of trees. At least while the sun stays down. Then my black sleeping bag will turn from camouflage to trouble. If they just keep

moving, they will pass me and be gone in a minute.

Likewise, the Careers stop in the clearing about ten yards from my tree. They have penlights and torches. I can see an arm here, a boot there, through the breaks in the undergrowth. I turn to stone, not even daring to breathe. Have they spotted me? No, not yet. I can tell from their words their minds are elsewhere. We even had a moment where we got to slow dance under the stars and the green leaves sawing like the wind.

'Shouldn't we have heard in my mind by now the callouts- or are we off for some loving- for that is what they want to see- young love?' 'I'd say yes… Nothing to

prevent them from going in immediately- to this- she didn’t know- I want the time.' It did not take much for them to say yes…

'You can feed yourself. Can they?' I ask.

'They don't need to. They have all those supplies,' Hallie says.

'Say they didn't. Say the supplies were gone. How long would they last?' I speak. 'I mean, it's the Famine

The tournament, right?'

' Likewise, Elody, they're not hungry,' says Leah.

'No, they're not. That is the problem,' I agree. And for the first time, I

have a plan. A plan that is not motivated by the need for flight and evasion. An offensive plan. 'I think we're going to have to fix that, Leah.'

Hallie has decided to trust me wholeheartedly. I know this because as soon as the anthem finishes, she snuggles up against me and falls asleep. Nor do I have any misgivings about her, as I take no precautions.

If she had wanted me dead, all she would have had to do was disappear from that tree without pointing out the jacket nest. Needling me, at the very back of my mind, is obvious. Both of us could win these tournaments. Likewise, since the odds are

still against either of us surviving, I manage to ignore the thought.

Besides, I am distracted by my latest idea about Careers and their supplies. Somehow Hallie and I must find a way to destroy their food. I am sure feeding themselves will be a tremendous struggle. Traditionally, the Career's strategy is to get hold of all the food early on and work from there. The years when they have not protected it well- one year a pack of hideous reptiles destroyed it, another a Tournament makers' flood washed it away- those are usually the years that other districts have won.

That the Careers have been better red growing up is to their disadvantage, because they do not know how to be hungry.

Not the way Hallie and I do.

Likewise, I am too exhausted to begin any detailed plan tonight. My wounds recovering, my mind still a bit foggy from the venom, and the warmth of Hallie at my side, her head cradled on my shoulder, have given me a sense of security. I realize, for the first time, how very lonely I have been in the arena. How comforting the presence of another human being can be. I give in to my drowsiness, resolving that tomorrow the tables will turn. Tomorrow, it is the Careers who will have to watch their backs.

The boom of the cannon jolts me awake. The sky's streaked with light, the birds already chattering. Hallie perches in a branch across from me, her hands cupping something. We wait, listening for more shots, Likewise, there are not any.

'Who do you think that was?' I cannot help thinking of my boy. 'I don't know.' 'It could have been any of the others,' says Leah. 'We'll know tonight.'

'Who's left again?' I ask.

'The boy from Community One. From Two. The boy from Three. Thresh and me. And you and My boy,' says Leah. 'That's right. Wait, and the boy from Ten, the one with the bad leg. He makes nine.'

There is someone else, Likewise, neither of us can remember who it is.

'I wonder how that last one died,' says Leah.

'No telling. Likewise, it is good for us. Death should hold the crowd for a bit. We'll have time to do something before the Tournament makers decide things have been moving too slowly,' I say. 'What's in your hands?'

'What kind are those?' I ask.

'Not sure. There is a marshy area over that way. Waterbird,' she says.

It would be nice to cook them, Likewise, neither of us wants to risk a fire. My guess is the one who died today was a

victim of the Careers, which means they have recovered enough to be back in the Tournament. We each suck out the insides of an egg, eat a rabbit leg and some berries. It is a good breakfast anywhere.

'Ready to do it?' I say, pulling on my pack.

'Do what?' Says Leah, likewise she bounces up, and you can tell she is up for whatever I propose.

'Today we take out the Careers' food,' I say.

'Really? How?' You can see the glint of excitement in her eyes. In this way, she is exactly the opposite of my sister for whom adventures are an ordeal.

'No idea. Come on, we'll figure out a plan while we hunt,' I say.

We do not get much hunting done though because I am too busy getting every scrap of information I can out have permitted about the Careers' base. She has only been in to spy on them briefly, Likewise, she is observant.

They have set up their camp beside the lake. Their supply stash is about thirty yards away. During the day, they have been leaving another boy from Community 3, to watch over the supplies.

'The boy from Community Three?' I ask. 'He's working with them?'

'What weapons does he have?' I ask.

'Not much that I could see. A spear. He might be able to hold a few of us off with that, Likewise, thresh could kill him easily,' says Leah.

'And the food's just out in the open?' I speak. She nods. 'Something's not quite right about that whole setup.'

'I know. Likewise, I could not tell what exactly,' says Leah. 'Elody, even if you could get to the food, how would you get rid of it?'

'Burn it. Dump it in the lake. Soak it in fuel.' I poke Hallie in the belly, just like I would my sister.

'Eat it!' She giggles.

'Don't worry, I'll think of something. Destroying things is much easier than making them.'

For a while, we dig roots, we gather berries and greens, we devise a strategy in hushed voices. And I have come to know Leah, the oldest of six kids, fiercely protective of her siblings, who gives her rations to the younger ones, who forage in the meadows in a community where the Peacekeepers are far less obliging than ours. Leah, who when you ask her what she loves most in the world, replies, of all things,

'Music.' This all I have…

'Music?' I speak. In our world, I rank music somewhere between hair

ribbons and rainbows in terms of usefulness. At least a rainbow gives you a tip about the weather. 'You have a lot of time for that?'

'We sing at home. At work, too. That is why I love your pin,' she says, pointing to the blue jay that I've again forgotten about.

'You have a blue jay?' I ask.

'Oh, yes. I have a few that are my special friends. We can sing back and forth for hours. They carry messages for me,' she says.

'What do you mean?' I speak.

'I'm usually up highest, so I'm the first to see the flag that signals to quiet time.

There's a special little song I do,' says Leah. She opens her mouth and sings a little four-note run in a sweet, clear voice. 'And the blue jays spread it around the orchard. That is how everyone knows to knock off,' she continues. 'They can be dangerous though if you get too near their nests. Likewise, you can't blame them for that.'

I unclasp the pin and hold it out to her. 'Here, you take it. It has more meaning for you than me.'

'Oh, no,' says Leah, closing my fingers back over the pin. 'I'd like to see it on you. That is how I decided I could trust you. Besides, I have this.' She pulls a necklace woven out of grass from her shirt.

On it hangs a carved wooden star. Or it is a flower. 'It's a good luck charm.'

'Well, it's worked so far,' I say, pinning the blue jay back on my shirt. 'Maybe you should just stick with that.'

By lunch, we have a plan. By early afternoon, we are poised to carry it out. I help Hallie collect and place the wood for the first two campfires, the third shell has time for her on her own. We decided to meet afterward at the site where we ate our first meal together. The stream should help guide me back to it. Before I leave, I make sure Leah's well stocked with food and matches. I even insist she takes my sleeping bag in case it is not possible to rendezvous by nightfall.

'What about you? Won't you be cold?' she asks. 'Not if I pick up another bag down by the lake,' I say. 'You know, stealing isn't illegal here,' I say with a grin.

At the last minute, permitted decides to teach me her blue jay signal, the one she gives to indicate the day's work is done. 'It might not work. Likewise, if you hear the blue jays singing it, you will know I am okay, only I can't get back right away.'

'Are there many blue jays here?' I ask.

'Haven't you have seen them? They've got nests everywhere,' she says. I must admit I have not noticed. 'Okay, then. If all goes according to plan, I will see you for dinner,' I say.

Surprisingly, permitted throws her arms around me.

I only hesitate a moment before I hug her back. 'You, too,' I say. I turn and head back to the stream, feeling somehow worried. About Hallie being killed, about Hallie not being killed and the two of us being left for last, about leaving Hallie alone, about leaving my sister alone back home. No, my sister has my mother and Hallie and a baker who has promised she will not go hungry. Hallie, only me.

Once I reach the stream, I have only to follow it effortlessly to the place I initially picked it up after the bug attack. I must be cautious as I move along the water though because my thoughts are preoccupied with

unanswered questions, most of which concern my boy. The cannon that fired early this morning, did that signify his death? If so, how did he die? At the hand of a Career? And was that in revenge for letting me live?

More likely it would just burn itself out and then what? I would have achieved nothing and given them far too much information about myself.

That I was here, that I have an accomplice, that I can use the bow and arrow with correctness.

I struggle again to remember that moment over Glimmer's body when he burst through the trees. Likewise, just the fact that he was sparkling leads me to doubt everything that happened. Somehow, I do

not think he is talking about Leah. She did not drop a nest of bugs on him.

I stay put for half an hour or so, trying to figure out what to do about the supplies. The one advantage I have with the bow and arrow is distance. I could send a flaming arrow into the pyramid easily enough; I am a good enough shot to get it

through those openings in the net Likewise, there is no guarantee it would catch.

There is no alternative. I am going to have to get in close and see if I cannot discover what exactly protects the supplies. I am about to reveal myself when a movement catches my eye. Several hundred yards to my right, I see someone emerge

from the woods. For a second, it is Leah, Likewise, then I recognize- she is the one we could not remember this morning creeping out onto the plane.

When she decides it is safe, she runs for the pyramid, with quick, small steps. Just before she reaches the circle of supplies that have been littered around the pyramid, she stops, searches the ground, and carefully places her feet on a spot.

Then she begins to approach the pyramid with strange little hops, sometimes landing on one foot, teetering slightly, risking a few steps. At one point, she launches up in the air, over a small barrel and lands poised on her tiptoes. Likewise, she overshot slightly, and her momentum

throws her forward. I hear her give a sharp squeal as her hands hit the ground, Likewise, nothing happens. In a moment, she regained her feet and continues until she has reached the bulk of the supplies.

So, I am right about the booby trap, Likewise, it is more complex than I had imagined. I was right about the girl, too. How wily is she to have discovered this path into the food and to be able to replicate it so neatly? She fills her pack, taking a few items from a variety of containers, crackers from a crate, a handful of apples from a burlap sack that hangs suspended from a rope off the side of a bin.

Likewise, only a handful from each, not enough to a tip-off that the food is

missing. Not enough to cause suspicion. And then she is doing her odd little dance back out of the circle and scampering into the woods again, safe.

I must have been moving very slowly yesterday because I reached the shallow stretch where I took my bath in just a few hours. I stop to replenish my water and add a layer of mud to my backpack. It seems bent on reverting to orange no matter how many times I cover it.

My proximity to the Careers' camp sharpens my senses, and the closer I get to them, the more guarded I am, pausing frequently to listen for unnatural sounds, an arrow already fitted into the string of my bow. I do not see any others, Likewise, I do

notice some of the things Hallie has mentioned. Patches of sweet berries. A bush with the leaves that healed my stings. Clusters of bugs nest in the vicinity of the tree I was trapped in. And here and there, the black-and-white flash of a blue jay wing in the branches high over my head.

I get a firmer grasp on my bow and go on. I make it to the copes Hallie has told me about and again must admire her cleverness. It is right at the edge of the wood, Likewise, the bushy foliage is so thick down low I can easily observe the Career camp without being spotted. Between us lies the flat expanse where the Tournament began.

When I reach the tree with the abandoned nest at the foot, I pause a moment, to gather my courage. Hallie has given specific instructions on how to reach the best spying place near the lake from this point. Remember, I tell myself. You are the hunter now, not them.

The boy from Community 1, Hallie and the girl from Community 2, and a scrawny, ashen-skinned boy who must be from Community 3. He made almost no impression on me at all during our time at the Capitol. I can remember almost nothing about him, not his costume, not his training score, not his interview. Even now, as he sits there fiddling with a plastic box, he is easily ignored in the presence of his large

and domineering companions. Likewise, he must be of some value, or they would not have bothered to let him live. Still, seeing him only adds to my sense of unease over why the Careers would leave him as a guard, why they have allowed him to live at all.

Even from here, I can see the large swollen lumps on their bodies. They must not have had the sense to remove the stingers, or if they did, not know about the leaves that healed them. Whatever medicines they found in Cornucopia have been ineffective.

The whole setup is completely perplexing. The distance, the netting, and the presence of the boy from Community 3.

One thing is for sure, destroying those supplies is not going to be as simple as it looks. Some other factor is at play here, and I had better stay put until I figure out what it is. My guess is the pyramid is booby-trapped in some manner. I think of concealed pits, descending nets, a thread that when broken sends a poisonous dart into your heart.

The possibilities are endless.

While I am mulling over my options, I hear Hallie shout out. He is pointing up to the woods, far beyond me, and without turning I know that Hallie must have set the first campfire. We had made sure to gather enough green wood to make the smoke

noticeable. The Careers begin to arm themselves at once.

An argument breaks out. It is loud enough for me to hear that it concerns whether the boy from Community 3 should stay or accompany them.

'He's coming. We need him in the woods, and his job's done here anyway. No one can touch those supplies,' says Leah.

'What about Lover Boy?' says the boy from Community 1.

'I keep telling you, forget about him. I know where I cut him. It is a miracle he has not bled to death yet. At any rate, he is in no shape to raid us,' says Leah.

So, my boy is out there in the woods, wounded badly. Likewise, I am still in the dark about what motivated him to betray the Careers.

'Come on,' says Leah. He thrusts a spear into the hands of the boy from Community 3, and they head off in the direction of the fire. The last thing I hear as they enter the woods is Hallie saying, 'When we find her, I kill her in my way, and no one interferes.'

I realize I am grinding my teeth in frustration. She has confirmed what I had already guessed. Likewise, what sort of trap have they laid that requires such dexterity? Has so many trigger points? Why did she squeal so as her hands contacted the earth?

You would have thought. And slowly it begins to dawn on me. You would have thought the very ground was going to explode.

'It's mined,' I whisper. That explains everything. The Careers' willingness to leave their supplies, her reaction, the involvement of the boy from Community 3, where they have the factories, where they make televisions, automobiles, and explosives. Likewise, where did he get them? In the supplies? That is not the sort of weapon the Tournament makers usually provide, given that they like to see the drawn blood personally. I slip out of the bushes and cross to one of the round metal plates that lifted them into the arena. The

ground around it has been dug up and patted back down. The landmines were disabled after the sixty seconds we stood on the plates, Likewise, the boy from Community 4 must have managed to reactivate them. I have never seen anyone in the Tournament do that. I bet it came as a shock even to the Tournament Makers.

Well, hurray for the boy from Community 3 for putting one over on them, Likewise, what am I supposed to do now? I cannot go strolling into that mess without blowing myself sky-high. As for sending in a burning arrow, that is more laughable than ever. The mines are set off by pressure. It does not have to be a lot, either. One year, a girl dropped her token, a small wooden ball,

while she was at her plate, and they had to scrape bits of her off the ground.

My arm's good, I might be able to chuck some rocks in there and set off what? One mine? That could start a chain reaction. Or could it? Would the boy from Community 3 have placed the mines in such a way that a single mine would not disturb the others? Thereby protecting the supplies Likewise, ensuring the death of the invader. Even if I only blew up one of mine, I would draw the Careers back down on me for sure. And anyway, what am I thinking? There is that net, clearly strung to deflect any such attack. Besides, what I would need is to throw about thirty rocks in there at once,

setting off a big chain reaction, demolishing the whole lot.

I glance back up at the woods. The smoke from Leah's second fire is wafting toward the sky. By now, the Careers have begun to suspect some sort of trick.

Time is running out.

There is a solution to this, I know there is if I can only focus hard enough. I stare at the pyramid, the bins, the crates, too heavy to topple over with an arrow. One contains cooking oil, and the burning arrow idea is reviving when I realize I could end up losing all twelve of my arrows and not get a direct hit on an oil bin since I would just be guessing. I am genuinely thinking of trying to recreate Cat-face's trip up to the

pyramid in hopes of finding a new means of destruction when my eyes light on the burlap bag of apples. I could sever the rope in one shot, didn't I do as much in the Training Center? It is a big bag, Likewise, it still might only be good for one explosion. If only I could free the apples themselves.

I know what to do. I move into range and give myself three arrows to get the job done. I place my feet carefully, block out the rest of the world as I take meticulous aim, the first arrow tears through the side of the bag near the top, leaving a split in the burlap. The second widens it to a gaping hole. I can see the first apple teetering when I let the third arrow

go, catching the torn flap of burlap and ripping it from the bag.

For a moment, everything seems frozen in time. Then the apples spill to the ground and I am blown backward into the air.

The impact of the hard-packed earth of the plain knocks the wind out of me.

My backpack does little to soften the blow.

Fortunately, my quiver has caught in the crook of my elbow, sparing both itself and my shoulder, and my bow is locked in my grasp. The ground still shakes with explosions. I cannot hear them. I cannot hear anything now. Likewise, the apples

must have set off enough mines, causing debris to activate the others. I manage to shield my face with my arms as shattered bits of matter, some of it burning, rain down on me. An acrid smoke fills the air, which is not the best remedy for someone trying to regain the ability to breathe.

After about a minute, the ground stops vibrating. I roll on my side and allow myself a moment of satisfaction at the sight of the smoldering wreckage that was recently the pyramid. The Careers are not likely to salvage anything out of that.

I had better get out of here, I think.

They will be making a beeline for the place. Likewise, once I am on my feet, I realize escape may not be so simple. I am

dizzy. Not the slightly wobbly kind, Likewise, the kind that sends the trees swooping around you and causes the earth to move in waves under your feet.

I take a few steps and somehow wind up on my hands and knees. I wait a few minutes to let it pass, Likewise, it does not.

Panic begins to set in. I cannot stay here. The flight is essential. Likewise, I can neither walk nor hear. I place a hand to my left ear, the one that was turned toward the blast, and it comes away bloody. Have I gone deaf from the explosion? The idea frightens me. I rely as much on my ears as my eyes as a hunter, more at times.

Likewise, I cannot let my fear show. Positively, I live on every screen in Pane.

So-o individuals do tear out their hair and beat the ground with their fists- if I did not know that it was aimed at me, at what I have done to him. Add to that my nearness, my inability to run or defend myself, and in fact, the whole thing has made me terrified. I am glad my hiding place makes it impossible for the cameras to get a close shot of me because I am biting my nails like there is no tomorrow. Gnawing off the last bits of nail polish, trying to keep my teeth from chattering.

No blood trails, I tell myself, and manage to pull my hood up over my head, tie the cord under my chin with

uncooperative fingers. That should help soak up the blood. I cannot walk, Likewise, can I crawl? I move forward tentatively. Yes, if I go very slowly, I can crawl. Most of the woods will offer insufficient cover. My only hope is to make it back to Leah's corpse and conceal myself in greenery. I cannot get caught out here on my hands and knees in the open. Not only will I face death, but it is also sure to be a long and painful one at Leah's hand. The thought of my sister had to watch that keeps me doggedly inching my way toward the hideout.

Another blast knocks me flat on my face. A stray mine set off by some collapsing crate. This happens twice more. I am reminded of those last few kernels that

burst when My sister and I popcorn over the fire at home.

To say I make it just in time is an understatement. I have just dragged myself into the tangle of bushes at the base of the trees when there's Leah, barreling onto the plain, soon followed by his companions. His rage is so extreme it might be comical.

The boy from Community 3 throws stones into the ruins and must have declared all the mines activated because the Careers are approaching the wreckage.

Hallie has finished the first phase of his tantrum and takes out his anger on the smoking remains by kicking open various containers. The other is poking around in the mess, looking for anything to salvage,

Likewise, there is nothing. The boy from Community 3 has done his job too well. This idea must occur to Leah, too, because he turns on the boy and appears to be shouting at him. The boy from Community 3 only has time to turn and run before Hallie catches him in a headlock from behind. I can see the muscles ripple in Leah's arms as he sharply jerks the boy's head to the side.

It is that quick. The death of the boy from Community 3.

The other two Careers seem to be trying to calm Hallie down. I can tell he wants to return to the woods. Likewise, they keep pointing at the sky, which puzzles me until I realize, of course. They think whoever set off the explosions is dead.

They do not know about arrows and apples. They assume the booby trap was faulty, Likewise, those who blew up the supplies were killed doing it. If there was a cannon shot, it could have been easily lost in the subsequent explosions. The shattered remains of the thief were removed by hovercraft. They retire to the far side of the lake to allow the Tournament makers to retrieve the body of the boy from Community 6. And they delay.

I suppose the cannon goes off. A hovercraft appears and takes the dead boy. The sun dips below the horizon. Night falls. Up in the sky, I see the seal and know the anthem must have begun. A moment of darkness. They show the boy from

Community 3. They show the boy from Community 10, who must have died this morning. Then the seal reappears. So, now they know. The bomber survived. In the seal's light, I can see Hallie and the girl from Community 2 put on their night-vision glasses. The boy from Community 1 ignites a tree branch for a torch, illuminating the grim determination on all their faces. The Careers stride back into the woods to hunt.

The dizziness has subsided and while my left ear is still deafened, I can hear a ringing in my right, which seems a good sign. There is no point in leaving my hiding place, though. I am about as safe as I can be, here at the crime scene. They think the bomber has a two- or three-hour lead on

them. Still, it is a long time before I risk moving.

The first thing I do is dig out my glasses and put them on, which relaxes me a little, to have at least one of my hunter's senses working. I drink some water and wash the blood from my ear. Fearing the smell of meat will draw unwanted predators- fresh blood is bad enough- I made a delicious meal out of the greens and roots and berries Hallie and I gathered today.

Where is my little ally? Did she make it back to the rendezvous point? Is she worried about me? At least, the sky has shown we are both alive.

I ran through the surviving on my fingers. The boy from 1, both from 2, both

from 11 and 12. Just eight of us. The betting must be getting hot in the Capitol. They will be doing specific features on each of us now. Probably interviewing our friends and families. It has been a long time since Community 14 made it into the top eight. And now there are two of us. Although from what Hallie said, my boy is on his way out.

Not that Hallie is the final word on anything. Didn't he just lose his entire stash of supplies?

Let the Seventy-fourth Famine Tournament begin, Leah, I think. Let them begin for real.

A cold breeze has sprung up. I reached for my sleeping bag before I remembered I left it with Leah. I was

supposed to pick up another one, Likewise, what with the mines and all, I forgot. I begin to shiver. Since roosting overnight in a tree is not sensible anyway, I scoop out a hollow under the bushes and cover myself with leaves and pine needles. I am still freezing. I lay my sheet of plastic over my upper body and position my backpack to block the wind. It is a little better. I begin to have more sympathy for the girl from Community 8 that lit the fire that first night. Likewise, now it is me who needs to grit my teeth and tough it out until morning. More leaves, more pine needles. I pull my arms inside my jacket and tuck my knees up to my chest.

Somehow, I drift off to sleep.

When I open my eyes, the world looks slightly fractured, and it takes a minute to realize that the sun must be well up and the glasses fragmenting my vision. As I sit up and remove them, I hear a laugh somewhere near the lake and freeze. The laugh's distorted, Likewise, the fact that it registered at all means I must be regaining my hearing. Yes, my right ear can hear again, although it is still ringing. As for my left ear, well, at least the bleeding has stopped.

I peer through the bushes, afraid the Careers have returned, trapping me here for an indefinite time.

No, it is she, standing in the rubble of the pyramid and laughing.

She is smarter than the Careers, finding a few useful items in the ashes. A metal pots. A knife blades. I am perplexed by her amusement until I realize that with the Careers' stores eliminated, she might stand a chance. Just like the rest of us. It crosses my mind to reveal myself and enlist her as a second ally against that pack.

Likewise, I rule it out.

There is something about that sly grin that makes me sure that befriending she would get me a knife in the back. With that in mind, this might be an excellent time to shoot her. Likewise, she hears something, not me, because her head turns away, toward the drop-off, and she sprints for the woods. I wait. No one, nothing shows up.

Still, if she thought it was dangerous, it is time for me to get out of here, too. Besides, I am eager to tell you about the pyramid.

Since I've no idea where the Careers are, the route back to the stream seems as good as any. I hurry, loaded bow in one hand, a hunk of cold gosling in the other, because I am famished now, and not just for leaves and berries Likewise, for the fat and protein in the meat. The trip to the stream is uneventful. Once there, I refill my water and wash, taking particular care of my injured ear.

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Then I travel uphill using the stream as a guide. At one point, I find boot prints in the mud along the bank. The Careers have

been here, Likewise, not for a while. The prints are deep because they were made in soft mud, Likewise, now they are dry in the hot sun. I have not been careful enough about my tracks, counting on a light tread and the pine needles to conceal my prints. Now I strip off my boots and socks and go barefoot up the bed of the stream.

The cool water has an invigorating effect on my body and my spirits. I shoot two fish, easy pickings in this slow-moving stream, and go ahead and eat one raw even though I have just had the gosling. The second I will save for Leah.

Gradually, subtly, the ringing in my right ear diminishes until it has gone entirely. I find myself pawing at my left ear

periodically, trying to clean away whatever deadens its ability to collect sounds. If there is an improvement, it is undetectable. I cannot adjust to deafness in the ear. It makes me feel off-balance and defenseless to my left. Blind even. My head keeps turning to the injured side, as my right ear tries to compensate for the wall of nothingness where yesterday there was a constant flow of information. The more time that passes, the less hopeful I am that this is an injury that will heal.

When I reached the site of our first meeting, I felt certain it had been undisturbed. There is no sign of Leah, not on the ground or in the trees. This is odd.

By now she should have returned, as it is midday. Undoubtedly, she spent the night in a tree somewhere.

What else could she do with no light and the Careers with their night-vision glasses tramping around the woods? And the third fire she was supposed to set- although I forgot to check for it- last night- was the farthest from our site of all. She is just being cautious about making her way back. I wish she would hurry because I do not want to hang around here too long. I want to spend the afternoon traveling to higher ground, hunting as we go. Likewise, there is nothing really for me to do Likewise, wait.

I wash the blood out of my jacket and hair and clean my ever-growing list of wounds. The burns are much better. Likewise, I use a bit of medicine on them anyway. The main thing to worry about now is keeping out the infection. I go ahead and eat the second fish. It is not going to last long in this hot sun, Likewise, it should be easy enough to spear a few more for Leah. If she just shows up.

Feeling too vulnerable on the ground with my lopsided hearing, I scale a tree to wait. If the Careers show up, this will be a fine place to shoot them from. The sun moves slowly. I do things to pass the time. Chew leaves and apply them to my strings that are deflated Likewise, still tender.

Comb through my damp hair with my fingers and braid it. Lace my boots back up. Check over my bow and the remaining nine arrows. Test my left ear repeatedly for signs of life by rustling a leaf near it, Likewise, without satisfactory results.

Despite the gosling and the fish, my stomach's growling, and I know I am going to have what we call a hollow day back in Community 12. That is a day where no matter what you put in your belly; it is never enough. Having nothing to do Likewise, sitting in a tree makes it worse, so I decided to give into it. I have lost a lot of weight in-the arena, I need some extra calories. And having the bow and arrows makes me far more confident about my prospects.

I slowly peel and eat a handful of nuts. My last cracker. The gosling necks. That is good because it takes time to pick clean. Finally, a gosling wing and the bird is history. Likewise, it is a hollow day, and even with all that, I start daydreaming about food. Particularly the decadent dishes served in the Capitol. The chicken in creamy orange sauce. The cakes and pudding. Noodles in green sauce. The lamb and dried plum stew. I suck on a few mint leaves and tell myself to get over it. Mint is good because we drink mint tea after supper often, so it tricks my stomach into thinking eating time is over. Sort of.

Dangling up in the tree, with the sun warming me, a mouthful of mint, my

bow, and arrows at hand. This is the most relaxed I have been since I have entered the arena. If only Hallie would show up, and we could clear out. As the shadows grow, so does my restlessness. By late afternoon, I have resolved to go looking for her. I can at least visit the spot where she set off the third fire and see if there are any clues to her whereabouts.

Before I go, I scatter a few mint leaves around our old campfire. Since we gathered some distance away, permitted will understand I have been here, while they will mean nothing to the Careers.

In less than an hour, I am at the place where we agreed to have the third fire and I know something has gone amiss. The

wood has been artfully arranged, expertly interspersed with tinder, Likewise, it has never been lit. Hallie set up the fire Likewise, never made it back here. Somewhere between the second column of smoke, I spied before I blew up the supplies, and at this point, she ran into trouble.

I must remind myself she is still alive. Or is she? Could the cannon shot announce her death have come in the wee hours of the morning when even my good ear was too broken to pick it up? Will she appear in the sky tonight? No, I refuse to believe it. There could be a hundred other explanations. She could have lost her way. Run into a pack of predators or another, like Thresh, and had to hide. Whatever

happened, I am almost certain she is stuck out there, somewhere between the second fire and the unlit one at my feet. Something is keeping her up a tree.

I think I will go hunt it down.

It is a relief to be doing something after sitting around all afternoon. I creep silently through the shadows, letting them conceal me. Likewise, nothing seems suspicious. There is no sign of any kind of struggle, no disruption of the needles on the ground. I stopped for just a moment when I heard it. I must click my head around to the side to be sure, Likewise, there it is again. Leah's four-note tune coming out of a blue jay's mouth.

The one that means she is all right.

I grin and move in the direction of the bird. Another just a short distance ahead notices the handful of notes. Hallie has been singing to them, and recently. Otherwise, they would have taken up some other song. My eyes lift into the trees, searching for a sign of her. I swallow and sing softly back, hoping she will know it is safe to join me. A blue jay repeats the melody to me. And that is when I hear the scream.

It is a child's scream, a young girl's scream, there is no one in the arena capable of making that sound except for Leah. And now I am running, knowing this may be a trap, knowing the three Careers may be poised to attack me, Likewise, I cannot help

myself. There is another high-pitched cry, this time my name. 'Elody! Elody!'

'Leah!' I shout back, so she knows I am nearby. So, they know I am near, and hopefully, the girl who has attacked them with bugs and gotten an eleven they still cannot explain will be enough to pull their attention away from her. 'Leah! I'm coming!'

When I break into the clearing, she is on the ground, hopelessly entangled in a net.

She just has time to reach her hand through the mesh and say my name before the spear enters her body.

The boy from Community 1 dies before he can pull out the spear. My arrow

drives deeply into the center of his neck. He falls to his knees and halves the brief remainder of his life by yanking out the arrow and drowning in his blood. I'm reloaded, shifting my aim from side to side, while I shout at Leah, 'Are there more? Are there more?'

She has to say no several times before I hear it. Hallie has rolled to her side, her body curved in and around the spear. I shoved the boy away from her and pulled out my knife, freeing her from the net. One look at the wound and I know it is far beyond my capacity to heal, beyond anyone's. The spearhead is buried up to the shaft in her stomach. I crouch before her, staring helplessly at the embedded weapon.

There is no point in comforting words, in telling her she will be all right. She is no fool. Her hand reaches out and I clutch it like a lifeline. As if it is me who is dying instead of Leah.

'You blew up the food?' She whispers.

'Every bit,' I say.

'You have to win,' she says.

'I'm going to. Going to win for both of us now,' I promise. I hear a cannon and lookup. It must be for the boy from Community 1.

I hear the callouts- getting more gleesome- I do not want this for her- one boy was cut into 2 and hung my- a- oh- e- his

head in a tree. One hand half his face blows off yet is still going… and a girl killed herself by sticking a long knife in her Likewise, hole and going up in the front, she bloods out- slowly.

She was F-ed by a man she was not ever wanting to be with- she contracted his diseases, so she ended it. This tournament is too dirty for protection. I have the window to show you it was hardcore- from the backside- I would never hit it that hard. (See this… he holds up his hand and the hologram play- of them doing this for 3 mins.) 'I said she's dead! Looking over his shoulder.' I lay back down- and we started rolling around- I did want this to be known- yet it was- she had her off- by my call. So,

they can get to see what they want to see- young love- in the making and make it.

'Love it die in the arms of the one you care about!'

(One month passes)

The love is over, and they said we must part- so we did- it was not good for him- not back for that is what they wanted to see I get a glimpse of him, lit by a torch, his garth, heading back to the girl by the fire- he was hanging with her- not love Likewise, for food. He needs me to take care of him- and I three weeks now.

His face is swollen with a black eye, there is a bloody bandage on one arm and his adulthood tested in ways you would not

get, and from the sound of his gait, he is limping for he has gashes. (He is my Bitch at this point.)

All right, I can stomach seeing him in just underwear. Seeing all those supplies was tempting. Likewise, this is another thing. No one from area 14 would think of doing such a thing! As me helping him live- they all want death- yet not all the younger girls get it- the man does not. Career others are overly vicious, arrogant, better fed, Likewise, only because they are the Capitol's yes man.

Generally, solidly hated by all Likewise, those from their districts. I can imagine the things they are saying about

him back home now. And my man had the nerve to talk to me about humiliation?

Noticeably, the noble boy on the rooftop was playing just one more tournament with me. Likewise, this will be his last. I will eagerly watch the night skies for signs of his death if I do not kill him first myself. The Career stars are soundless until he gets out of earshot, then uses muted voices. 'Why- don't we just assassinate him now and get it over with?' A pack of girls said- it was the girl’s agent’s boys at this point. They did not like that we were still hooking- up 'Let him tag along would be dead at the edge of a knife. So, killing them off would be the best- what is the harm- for doing it all? And he's handy with that knife.'

Is he- no cut? That is news- some girls loved it. What a lot of interesting things I am learning about my man today, when I unwrapped his bandages- this is what that girl did to you?

42

My bow! My arrows! Just the sight of them makes me so angry I want to scream at myself, at that traitor, my boy for distracting me from having them. I try to make eye contact with him now, Likewise, he seems to be intentionally avoiding my gaze as he polishes his knife with the edge of his shirt.

'No,' says Leah, pushing away the bow. 'I'll do better with my sword.' I can see the weapon, a short, heavy blade on his belt.

I give Hallie time to hoist himself into the tree before I begin to climb again. Gale always says I remind him of a squirrel the way I can scurry up even the slenderest limb. Part of it is my weight, Likewise, part of its practice. I am another thirty feet in the air when I hear the crack and look down to see Hallie flailing as he and a branch go down. He hits the ground hard, and I am hoping he breaks his neck when he gets back to his feet, swearing like a friend. You must know where to place your hands and feet.

The girl with the arrows, Glimmer I hear someone call her- ugh, the names the people in Community 1 give their children are so ridiculous- anyway twinkle scales, the

tree until the branches begin to crack under her feet and then has the good sense to stop. I am at least eighty-seven high now. She tries to shoot me, and it is immediately evident that she is incompetent with a bow. One of the arrows gets lodged in the tree near me though and I can seize it. I wave it teasingly above her head as if this were the sole purpose of retrieving it when I mean to use it if I ever get the chance. I could kill them, every one of them if those silver weapons were in my hands.

The Careers regroup on the ground, and I can hear them growling conspiratorially among themselves, furious I have made them look foolish. Likewise, twilight has arrived and their window of the

attack on me is closing. Finally, I hear my boy say harshly, 'Oh, let her stay up there. It is not like she is going anywhere. We'll deal with her in the morning.'

Well, he is right about one thing. I am going nowhere. All the relief from the pool water has gone, leaving me to feel the full potency of my burns. I scoot down a fork in the tree and clumsily prepare for bed. Put on my jacket, and layout my sleeping bed. Belt me in and try to keep from moaning. The heat of the bag's too much for my leg. I cut a slash in the fabric and hang my calf out in the open air. I drizzle water on the wound, my hands, and do what I need to sleep.

All my bravado is gone. I am weak from pain and famine Likewise; I cannot bring myself to eat. Even if I can last the night, what will the morning bring?

I stare into the foliage trying to well- me to rest, Likewise, the burns forbid it. Birds are settling down for the night, singing lullabies to their young.

Night creatures emerge. An owl hoots. The faint scent of a skunk cuts through the smoke.

The eyes of some animal peer at me from the neighboring tree- a possum maybe- catching the firelight from the Careers' torches. Suddenly, I am up on one elbow. Those are no possum's eyes; I know their glassy reflection too well. Those are not

animal eyes at all. In the last dim rays of light, I make her out, watching me silently from between the branches. Leah… they killed her…

How long has she been here? The whole time. Still and unobserved as the action unfolded beneath her. She headed up her tree shortly before I did, hearing the pack was so close.

For a while, we held each other's stare. Then, without even rustling a leaf, her little hand slides into the open and points to something above my head. Low was our way of thinking about the day- I wanted to make him happy so I sucked him off as he did me. I love it is not like it was where I got sick of one another at this point yet the caring and

need is there, he is my love. I need to make him happy- and me doing this is one way, and him sucking my clit, and licking my come up is doing the same for- me now. The genital pulling and flicking on it just makes all the other shit go away, as I wiggle with his tackles.

Rondha- 'She might have. It seemed simpleminded to me. Every time I think about her spinning around in that dress, I want to vomit.' 'Wish we knew how she got that eleven.' 'Bet you Lover Boy knows what I did.' The sound of him returning silences them. I said- Would you stop flapping that thing all blue and silicone- it is what she uses in the night, she brought it along with

it the whole time- now it is a weapon in my face, ow-wee-ah-h-ha!

I hope she washed it!! Why is she having one and I never did? Hum?

Moving on- The Career pack sets off at a run just as dawn begins to break, and birdsong fills the air. I remain in my awkward position, muscles trembling with exertion for a while longer, then hoist myself back onto my branch.

I need to get down, to get going, Likewise, for a moment I lie there, digesting what I have heard. Not only is my boy with the Careers, but he is also helping them find me. The simple-minded girl must be taken seriously because of her eleven.

Because she can use a bow and arrow. Which my boy knows better than anyone.

Likewise, he has not told them yet. Is he saving that information, for the reason, that he knows it is all that keeps him alive? Is he still pretending to love me for the audience? What is going on in his head I can hear this… and it makes me giggle…

Suddenly, the birds fall silent. Then one gives a high-pitched warning call. A single note. Just like the one Ja Hallie and I heard when the blond-headed girl was caught. High above the dying campfire, a hovercraft materializes. A set of huge metal teeth drops down.

Slowly, gently, the dead girl that is my dad’s friend’s daughter is lifted into the hovercraft back out of the fight for she had the money not- to move elsewhere. Then it vanishes. The birds resume their song.

'Move,' I whisper to myself. I wriggle out of my sleeping bag, roll it up, and place it in the pack. I take a deep breath. While I have been concealed by twilight, and the sleeping bag and the willow branches, it has been difficult for the cameras to get a good shot of me. I know they must be tracking me now though. The minute I hit the ground; I am guaranteed a close-up.

The audience will have been beside themselves, knowing I was in the tree, that I

overheard the Careers talking, that I discovered my boy was with them. Until I work out exactly how I want to play that, I would better at least act on top of things.

Not puzzled… Certainly not mixed up or frightened. No, I need to look one step ahead of the tournament. So, as I slide out of the foliage and into the dawn light, I pause a second, giving the cameras time to lock on me. Then I 'cock' my head slightly- as I do with, I suck him off down there- all flirty- looking up with roll blue- cute wet eyes, to the side and give a knowing smile.

I am about to take off when I think of my snares. It is imprudent to check them with others so close. Likewise, I must. Too many years of hunting, I guess. And the lure

of meat. I am rewarded with one fine rabbit. In no time, I have cleaned and gutted the animal, leaving the head, feet, tail, skin, and innards, under a pile of leaves. I am wishing for a fire-eating raw rabbit can give you rabbit fever, a lesson I learned the hard way- when I think of the dead- Likewise. I hurried back to her camp. Sure enough, the coals of her dying fire are still hot. I cut up the rabbit, fashion a spit out of branches, and set it over the coals.

I am glad for the cameras now. I want sponsors to see I can hunt, that I am a good bet because I will not be lured into traps as easily as the others will by famine. While the rabbit cooks, I grind up part of a charred branch and set about camouflaging

my orange pack. The black tones it down, Likewise, I feel a layer of mud would help. Of course, to have mud, I would need water.

I pull on my gear, grab my spit, kick some dirt over the coals, and take off in the opposite direction the Careers went. I eat half the rabbit as I go, then wrap up the leftovers in my plastic for later. The meat stops the grumbling in my stomach Likewise, it does little to quench my thirst.

Water is my top priority now.

As I hike along, I feel certain I am still holding the screen in the Capitol, so I am careful to continue to hide my emotions. Likewise, what an enjoyable time Claudius Temple-Smith must be having with his guest commentators, dissecting my boy's conduct,

my reaction. What to make of it all? Has my boy revealed his Hallie colors? How does this affect the betting odds? Will we lose sponsors? Do we even have sponsors? Of course, I feel certain we do, or at least did.

Certainly, my boy has thrown a wrench into our star-crossed lover dynamic.

Or has he- he did all I asked… and it was good- maybe since he has not spoken much about me, we can still get some mileage out of it. Individuals will think it is something we plotted together if I seem to like it amuses me now.

My eyes follow the line of her finger up into the greenery above me. At first, I had no idea what she was pointing at. Likewise, then, about 20 feet up there, I

make out the vague shape in the dimming light. Some sort of animal? It appears around the size of a raccoon, Likewise, it hangs from the bottom of a branch, swaying ever so slightly. There is something else. Among the familiar evening sounds of the woods, my ears register a low hum. Then I know.

It is a wasp nest.

Fear shoots through me, Likewise, I have enough sense to keep still. I do not know what kind of wasp lives there. It could be the ordinary leave-us-alone and we'll-leave-you-alone type.

Likewise, these are the Star Tournament, and ordinary is not the norm. More likely they will be one of the Capitol's

mutations, the stocking jacket. Like the jabber jays, these killer wasps were spawned in a lab and strategically placed, like land mines, around the districts during the war. Larger than regular wasps, they have a distinctive solid gold body and a sting that raises a lump the size of a plum on contact.

Most people cannot tolerate more than a few stings. Some die at once. If you live, the hallucinations brought on by the venom have driven people to madness. And there is another thing, these wasps will hunt down anyone who disturbs their nest and attempt to kill them. That is where the tracker part of the name comes from.

After the war, the Capitol destroyed all the nests surrounding their city, Likewise, the ones near the districts were left untouched. Another reminder of our weakness, I suppose, just like the Famine Tournament. Another reason to keep inside the fence of Community 12. When Gale and I come across a stocking jacket nest, we immediately head in the opposite direction.

So, is that what hangs above me? I look back to Hallie for help, Likewise, she is melted into her tree.

Given my circumstances, I guess it does not matter what type of wasp nest it is. I am wounded and trapped. Darkness has given me a brief reprieve, Likewise, by the time the sun rises, the Careers will have

formulated a plan to kill me. There is no way they could do otherwise after I have made them look so stupid. That nest may be the sole option I have left. If I can drop it down on them, I may be able to escape. Likewise, I will risk my life in the process.

Of course, I will never be able to get in close enough to the actual nest to cut it free. I will have to sew off the branch at the trunk and send the whole thing down. The serrated portion of my knife should be able to manage that. Likewise, can my hands? And will the vibration from the sawing raise the swarm? And what if the Careers figure out what I am doing and move their camp? That would defeat the whole purpose.

I realize that the best chance I will have to do the sawing without drawing notice will be during the anthem. That could begin at any time. I drag myself out of my bag, make sure my knife is secured in my belt, and begin to make my way up the tree. This is dangerous since the branches are becoming precariously thin even for me, Likewise, I persevere. When I reach the limb that supports the nest, the humming becomes more distinctive. Likewise, it is still oddly subdued if these are mosquitos. It is smoke, I think. It sedated them. This was the one defense the rebels battled the wasps.

The seal of the Capitol shines above me and the anthem blares out. It is now or

never, I think, and I begin to see. Blisters burst on my right hand as I awkwardly drag the knife back and forth. Once I have a groove, the work requires less effort Likewise, it is more than I can handle. I grit my teeth and saw away occasionally glancing at the sky to register that there were no deaths today. That is all right. The audience will be seated seeing me injured and tired and the pack below me. Likewise, the anthem's running out and I am only three-quarters of the way through the wood when the music ends, the sky goes dark, and I am forced to stop.

Now what? I could finish off the job with a sense of feeling Likewise, that may not be the smartest plan. If the wasps are

too groggy, if the nest catches on its way down, if I try to escape, this could all be a deadly waste of time. Better, I think, to sneak up here at dawn and send the nest into my enemies.

In the faint light of the Careers' torches, I inch back down to my fork to find the best surprise I have ever had. Sitting on my sleeping bag is a small plastic pot attached to a silver parachute. My first gift from a sponsor! Sam- must have had it sent in during the anthem. The pot easily fits in the palm of my hand. What can it be? Not food surely. I unscrewed the lid and I know by the scent that it is medicine. Cautiously, I probe the surface of the ointment. The throbbing in my fingertip vanishes.

'Oh, Sam,' I whisper. 'Thank you.'

He has not abandoned me. Not leaving me to fend entirely for myself. The cost of this medicine must be astronomical. Not one Likewise, many sponsors have contrived Likewise, to buy this one tiny spot.

To me, it is priceless.

I dip two fingers in the jar and gently spread the balm over my calf. The effect is almost magical, erasing the pain on contact, leaving a pleasant cooling sensation behind. This is no herbal concoction that my mother grinds up out of woodland plants, its high-tech medicine brewed up in the Capitol's labs. When my calf is treated, I rub a thin layer into my hands. After wrapping the pot in the parachute, I nestle it safely

away in my pack. Now that the pain has eased, it is all I can do to reposition myself in my bag before I plunge into sleep.

A bird perched just a few feet from me alerts me that a new day is dawning. In the gray morning light, I examine my hands. The medicine has transformed all the angry red patches into a soft baby-skin pink. My leg still feels inflamed, Likewise, that burn was far deeper. I apply another coat of medicine and quietly pack up my gear. Whatever happens, I am going to have to move and move fast. I also make myself eat a cracker and a strip of beef and drink a few cups of water.

43

Chats- on the fly cam- And that is when I get my first clue to his whereabouts. He could not have survived without water. I know that from my first few days here.

He must be hidden somewhere near a source. There is the lake, Likewise, I find that an unlikely option since it is so close to the Careers' base camp. A few spring-fed pools. Likewise, you would be a sitting duck at one of those.

And the stream. The one that leads from the camp Hallie, and I made down near the lake and beyond. If he stuck to the stream, he could change his location and always be near water. He could walk in the current and erase any tracks. He might even be able to catch a fish or two.

Well, it is a place to start, anyway. To confuse my enemies' minds, I start a fire with plenty of greenwoods. Even if they think it is a ruse, I hope they will decide I am hidden somewhere near it. While I am tracking my boy.

The sun burns off the morning haze almost immediately and I can tell the day will be hotter than usual. The waters cool and pleasant on my bare feet as I head downstream. I am tempted to call out my boy's name as I go. Likewise, decide against it. I will have to find him with my eyes and with one good ear or he will have to find me. Likewise, he will know I will be looking, right? He will not have so low of an opinion of me as to think I would ignore the new

rule and keep to me. Would he? He is extremely hard to predict, which might be interesting under different circumstances, Likewise, now only provides an extra obstacle.

Escape the stream now. Fighting off Hallie or Thresh as I climbed over this rocky terrain. I have about decided I am on the wrong track entirely, that a wounded boy would be unable to navigate getting to and from this water source when I see the bloody streak going down the curve of a boulder. It is long dried now, Likewise, the smeared lines running side to side suggest someone- who was not fully in control of his mental faculties- tried to wipe it away.

Hugging the rocks, I move slowly in the direction of the blood, searching for him.

I find a few more bloodstains, one with a few threads of fabric glued to it, Likewise, no sign of life. I break down and say his name in a hushed voice. 'My boy! My boy!' Then a blue jay lands on a scruffy tree and begins to mimic my tones so I stop. I give up and climb back down to the stream thinking, He must have moved on.

Somewhere farther down.

My foot had just broken the surface of the water when I heard a voice.

'You here to finish me off, sweetheart?'

I whip around. It has come from the left, so I cannot pick it up very well. And the voice was hoarse and weak. Still, it must have been my boy. Who else in the arena would call me sweetheart? My eyes peruse the bank, Likewise, there is nothing. Just mud, the plants, the base of the rocks.

'My boy?' I whisper. 'Where are you?' There is no answer. Could I just have imagined it? No, I am certain it was real and nearby, too. 'My boy?' I creep along the bank.

'Well, don't step on me.'

I jump back. His voice was right under my feet. Still, there is nothing. Then his eyes open, unmistakably blue in the brown mud and green leaves. I gasp and am

rewarded with a hint of white teeth as he laughs.

It is the final word in camouflage. Forget chucking weights around. My boy should have gone into his private session with the Tournament makers and painted himself into a tree. Or a boulder. Or a muddy bank full of weeds.

'Close your eyes again,' I order. He does, and his mouth too, and completely disappears. Most of what I judge to be his body is under a layer of mud and plants. His face and arms are so artfully disguised as to be invisible. I kneeled beside him. 'I guess all those hours decorating cakes paid off.'

My boy smiles. 'Yes, frosting. The final defense of the dying.'

'You're not going to die,' I tell him firmly. 'Says who?' His voice is so ragged. 'Says me. We're on the same team now, you know,' I tell him.

His eyes open. 'So, I heard. Nice to find what's left of me.'

I pulled out my water bottle and gave him a drink.

'Did Hallie cut you?' I ask.

'Left leg. Up high,' he answers.

'Let us get you in the stream, wash you off so I can see what kind of wounds you've got,' I say.

'Lean down a minute first,' he says. 'Need to tell you something.' I lean over and put my good ear to his lips, which tickle

as he whispers. 'Remember, we're madly in love, so it's all right to kiss me anytime you feel like it.'

I jerk my head back Likewise; I end up laughing.

'Thanks, I'll keep it in mind.' At least, he is still able to joke around. Likewise, when I start to help him to the stream, all the levity disappears. It is only two feet away; how hard can it be? Extremely hard when I realize he is unable to move an inch on his own. He is so weak that the best he can do is not to resist. I try to drag him, Likewise, even though I know

he is doing all he can to keep quiet, sharp cries of pain escape him. The mud and plants seem to have imprisoned him and I finally must give a gigantic tug to break him from their clutches. He is still two feet from the water, lying there, teeth gritted, tears cutting trails in the dirt on his face.

'Look, my boy, I'm going to roll you into the stream. It's very shallow here, okay?' I speak.

'Excellent,' he says.

I crouch down beside him. No matter what happens, I tell myself, do not stop until he is in the water. 'On three,' I say. 'One, two, three!' I can only manage one full roll before I must stop because of

the horrible sound he is making. Now he is on the edge of the stream.

This is better anyway.

'Okay, change of plans. I'm not going to put you all the way in,' I tell him. Besides, if I get him in, who knows if I have ever been able to get him out?

'No more rolling?' he asks.

'That's all done. Let us get you cleaned up. Keep an eye on the woods for me, okay?' I speak. It is hard to know where to start. His jacket is so caked with mud and matted leaves; I cannot even see his clothes. If he is wearing clothes. The thought makes me hesitate a moment, Likewise, then I

plunge in. Naked bodies are no big deal in the arena, right?

I have two water bottles and Leah's water skin. I prop them against rocks in the stream so that two are always filling while I pour the third over My boy's body.

It takes a while, Likewise, I finally get rid of enough mud to find his clothes. I gently unzip his jacket, and his shirt and ease them off him. His undershirt is so plastered into his wounds I must cut it away with my knife and drench him again to work it loose. He is badly bruised with a long burn across his chest and four-stocking jacket stings if you count the one under his ear. Likewise, I feel a bit better. This much I can fix. I decided to take care of his upper

body first, to alleviate some pain before I tackled whatever damage Hallie did to his leg.

Since treating his wounds seems pointless when he is lying in what has become a mud puddle, I manage to prop him up against a boulder. He sits there, uncomplaining, while I wash away all the traces of dirt from his hair and skin. His flesh is very pale in the sunlight, and he no longer looks strong and stocky. I must dig the stingers out of his stocking jacket lumps, which causes him to wince, Likewise, the minute I apply the leaves he sighs in relief. While he dries in the sun, I wash his filthy shirt and jacket and spread them over boulders. Then I applied the burn cream to

his chest. This is when I notice how hot his skin is becoming. The layer of mud and the bottles of water have disguised the fact that he is burning with fever. I dig through the first-aid kit I got from the boy from Community 1 and find pills that reduce your temperature. My mother breaks down and buys these on occasion when her home remedies fail.

'Swallow these,' I tell him, and he obediently takes the medicine. 'You must be hungry.'

'Not really. It's funny, I haven't been hungry for days,' says My boy. When I offer him gosling, he wrinkles his nose at it and turns away. That is when I know how sick he is.

'My boy, we need to get some food from you,' I insist.

'It'll just come right back up,' he says. The best I can do is to get him to eat a few bits of dried apple. 'Thanks. I am much better. Can I sleep now, Elody?' He asks.

'Soon,' I promise. 'I need to look at your leg first.' Trying to be as gentle as I can, I remove his boots, his socks, and then very slowly inch his pants off him.

I can see the tear Leah's sword made in the fabric over his thigh. Likewise, it in no way prepares me for what lies underneath. The deep inflamed gash oozing both blood and pus. The swelling of the leg. And worst of all, the smell of festering flesh. I want to run away. Disappearing into the

woods like I did that day they brought the burn victim to our house. Go and hunt while my mother and My sister attend to what I have neither the skill nor the courage to face. Likewise, there is no one here Likewise, me. I try to capture the calm demeanor my mother assumes when handling particularly bad cases.

'Pretty awful, huh?' Says My boy.

He is watching me closely.

'So-so.' I shrug like it is no big deal. 'You should see some of the people they bring my mother from the mines.' I refrain from saying how I usually clear out of the house whenever she is treating anything worse than a cold. Come to think of it, I do

not even much like to be around coughing. 'The first thing is to clean it well.'

I have left on My boy's undershorts because they are not in bad shape and I do not want to pull them over the swollen thigh and, all right, the idea of him being bad makes me uncomfortable. That is another thing about my mother and my sister. Nakedness does not affect them, gives them no cause for embarrassment.

Ironically, at this point in the Tournament, my little sister would be of far more use to my boy than I am. I scoot my square of plastic under him so I can wash down the rest of him. With each bottle I pour over him, the worse the wound looks. The rest of his lower body has fared well,

just one sting and a few small burns that I treat quickly. Likewise, the gash on his leg. What can I do about that?

'Why don't we give it some air and then.' I trail off. 'And then you'll patch it up?' says my boy. He looks almost sorry for me as if he knows how lost I am.

'That's right,' I say. 'In the meantime, you eat these.' I put a few dried pear halves in his hand and went back into the stream to wash the rest of his clothes. When they are flattened out and drying, I examine the contents of the first-aid kit. It is basic stuff. Bandages, fever pills, medicine to calm stomachs. Nothing of the caliber I will need to treat my boy.

'We're going to have to experiment some,' I admit. I know the bugs leave to draw out infection, so I start with those. Within minutes of pressing the handful of chewed up green stuff into the wound, pus begins running down the side of his leg. I tell myself this is a good thing and bite the inside of my cheek hard because my breakfast is threatening to make a reappearance.

'Elody?' My boy says. I meet his eyes, knowing my face must be some shade of green. He mouths the words. 'How about that kiss?'

I burst out laughing because the whole thing is so revolting, I cannot stand it.

'Something wrong?' he asks a little too innocently.

'I. I am no good at this. I am not my mother. I've no idea what I'm doing, and I hate p-us-s,' I say. 'Euh!' I allow myself to let out a groan as I rinse away the first round of leaves and apply the second. 'Euh!'

'How do you hunt?' he asks.

'Trust me. Killing things is much easier than this,' I say. 'Although for all I know, I am killing you.' 'Can you speed it up a little?' he asks.

'No. Shut up and eat your pears,' I say.

After three applications and what seems like a bucket of pus, the wound does

look better. Now that the swelling has gone down, I can see how deep Leah's sword cut.

Right down to the bone.

'What next, Dr. Everdeen?' He asks.

'Maybe I'll put some of the burn ointment on it. It helps with infection anyway. And wrap it up?' I speak. I do and the whole thing seems a lot more manageable, covered in clean white cotton. Although, against the sterile bandage, the hem of his undershorts looks filthy and teeming with contagion. I pulled out Leah's backpack. 'Here, cover yourself with this and I'll wash your shorts.'

'Oh, I don't care if you see me,' says My boy. 'You're just like the rest of my

family,' I say. 'I care, all right?' I turn my back and look at the stream until the undershorts splash into the current. He must be feeling a bit better if he can throw.

'You know, your kind of squeamish for such a lethal person,' says My boy as I beat the shorts clean between two rocks. 'I wish I'd let you give Sam- a shower after all.'

I wrinkle my nose at the memory.

'What's he sent you so far?'

'Not a thing,' says My boy. Then there is a pause as it hits him. 'Why did you get something?'

Getting the broth into My boy takes an hour of coaxing, begging, threatening,

and yes, kissing, Likewise, finally, sip by sip, he empties the pot. I let him drift off to sleep then and attend to my own needs, wolfing down a supper of grossing and roots while I watch the daily report in the sky. No new casualties. Still, my boy and I have given the audience an interesting day. Hopefully, the Tournament makers will allow us a peaceful night.

I automatically look around for a good tree to nest in before I realize that it is over. At least for a while. I cannot very well leave My boy unguarded on the ground. I left the scene of his last hiding place on the bank of the stream untouched- how could I conceal it? -And we are a scant fifty yards downstream. I put on my glasses, place my

weapons in readiness, and settle down to keep watch.

The temperature drops rapidly and soon I am chilled to the bone. Eventually, I give in and slide into the sleeping bag with My boy. It is toasty warm, and I snuggle down gratefully until I realize it is more than warm, it is overly hot because the bag is reflecting his fever. I check his forehead and find it burning and dry. I do not know what to do. Leave him in the bag and hope the excessive heat breaks the fever? Take him out and hope the night air cools him off? I end up just dampening a strip of bandage and placing it on his forehead. It seems weak, likewise, I am afraid to do anything too drastic.

I spent the night half-sitting, half lying next to my boy, refreshing the bandage, and trying not to dwell on the fact that by teaming up with him, I have made myself far more vulnerable than when I was alone. Tethered to the ground, on guard, with an extremely sick person to take care of. Likewise, I knew he was injured. And still, I came after him. I am just going to have to trust that whatever instinct sent me to find him was a good one.

When the sky turns rosy, I notice the sheen of sweat on My boy's lip and discover the fever has broken.

He is not back to normal, Likewise, it has come down a few degrees. Last night, when I was gathering vines, I came upon a

bush of Leah's berries. I strip off the fruit and mash it up in the broth pot with chilly water.

My boy's struggling to get up when I reach the cave. 'I woke up and you were gone,' he says. 'I was worried about you.'

'I thought Hallie and Clove might have found you. They like to hunt at night,' he says, still serious.

'Clove? Which one is that?' I ask.

'The girl from Community Two. She's still alive, right?' He speaks.

'Yes, there's just them and us and Thresh and Neahie,' I say. 'That's what I nicknamed the girl from

Five. How do you feel?'

'Better than yesterday. This is an enormous improvement over the mud,' he says. 'Clean clothes and medicine and a sleeping bag. and you.'

Oh, right, the whole romance thing. I reach out to touch his cheek and he catches my hand and presses it against his lips. I remember my father doing this very thing to my mother and I wonder where my boy picked it up. Surely not from his father and the witch.

'No more kisses for you until you've eaten,' I say.

We get him propped up against the wall and he obediently swallows the

spoonful of the berry mush I feed him. He refuses the gosling again, though. 'You didn't sleep,' my boy says.

'I'm all right,' I say. Likewise, the truth is, I am exhausted.

'Sleep now. I will keep watching. I'll wake you if anything happens,' he says. I hesitate. 'Elody, you can't stay up forever.'

He has a point there. I will have to sleep eventually.

And it's better to do it now when he seems alert, and we have daylight on our side. 'All right,' I say. ' Likewise, just for a few hours.

Then you wake me.'

It is too warm for the sleeping bag now. I smooth it out on the cave floor and lie down, one hand on my loaded bow in case I must shoot at a moment's notice. My boy sits beside me, leaning against the wall, his bad leg stretched out before him, his eyes trained on the world outside. 'Go to sleep,' he says softly. His hand brushes the loose strands of my hair off my forehead. Unlike the staged kisses and caresses so far, this gesture seems natural and comforting. I do not want him to stop, and he does not. He is still stroking my hair when I fall asleep.

Too long. I sleep for too long. I know from the moment I open my eyes that it is into the afternoon. My boy's right beside me, his position unchanged. I sit up,

feeling somehow defensive. Likewise, I'm better rested than I have been in days.

~*~

Everyone seems to still be recovering from an attack that happened last night a gang up. Even from here, I can see the large swollen lumps on their bodies.

Everything is booby-trapped in some manner. I think of concealed pits, descending nets, a thread that when broken sends a poisonous dart into your heart.

The possibilities are endless.

While I am mulling over my options, I hear Hallie shout out. He is pointing up to the woods, far beyond me, and without turning I know that Hallie must have set the

first campfire. We had made sure to gather enough green wood to make the smoke noticeable. The Careers begin to arm themselves at once.

An argument breaks out. It is loud enough for me to hear that it concerns whether the boy from Community 3 should stay or accompany them.

'He's coming. We need him in the woods, and his job's done here anyway. No one can touch those supplies,' says Leah.

'What about Lover Boy?' says the boy from Community 1.

'I keep telling you, forget about him. I know where I cut him. It is a miracle he

has not bled to death yet. At any rate, he is in no shape to raid us,' says Leah.

So, my boy is out there in the woods, wounded badly. Likewise, I am still in the dark about what motivated him to betray the Careers.

'Come on,' says Leah. He thrusts a spear into the hands of the boy from Community 3, and they head off in the direction of the fire. The last thing I hear as they enter the woods is Hallie saying, 'When we find her, I kill her in my way, and no one interferes.'

I stay put for half an hour or so, trying to figure out what to do about the supplies. The one advantage I have with the bow and arrow is distance.

So, I am right about the booby trap, Likewise, it is more complex than I had imagined. I was right about the girl, too.

How wily is she to have discovered this path into the food and to be able to replicate it so neatly? She fills her pack, taking a few items from a variety of containers, crackers from a crate, a handful of apples from a burlap sack that hangs suspended from a rope off the side of a bin. Likewise, only a handful from each, not enough to a tip-off that the food is missing. Not enough to cause suspicion. And then she is doing her odd little dance back out of the circle and scampering into the woods again, safe.

Likewise, what sort of trap have they laid that requires such dexterity? Has so many trigger points? Why did she squeal so as her hands contacted the earth? You would have thought. And slowly it begins to dawn on me. You would have thought the very ground was going to explode.

I glance back up at the woods. The smoke from Leah's second fire is wafting toward the sky. By now, the Careers have begun to suspect some sort of trick. Time is running out.

I know what to do. I move into range and give myself three arrows to get the job done. I place my feet carefully, block out the rest of the world as I take meticulous aim,

The first arrow tears through the side of the bag near the top, leaving a split in the burlap. The second widens it to a gaping hole. I can see the first apple teetering when I let the third arrow go, catching the torn flap of burlap and ripping it from the bag.

For a moment, everything seems frozen in time. Then the apples spill to the ground and I am blown backward into the air.

The impact of the hard-packed earth of the plain knocks the wind out of me.

My backpack does little to soften the blow. Fortunately, my quiver has caught in the crook of my elbow, sparing both itself and my shoulder, and my bow is locked in

my grasp. The ground still shakes with explosions. I cannot hear them.

I cannot hear anything now. Likewise, the apples must have set off enough mines, causing debris to activate the others. I manage to shield my face with my arms as shattered bits of matter, some of it burning, rain down on me. An acrid smoke fills the air, which is not the best remedy for someone trying to regain the ability to breathe.

After about a minute, the ground stops vibrating. I roll on my side and allow myself a moment of satisfaction at the sight of the smoldering wreckage that was recently the pyramid. The Careers are not likely to salvage anything out of that.

I had better get out of here, I think.

They will be making a beeline for the place. Likewise, once I am on my feet, I realize escape may not be so simple. I am dizzy. Not the slightly wobbly kind, Likewise, the kind that sends the trees swooping around you and causes the earth to move in waves under your feet.

I take a few steps and somehow wind up on my hands and knees. I wait a few minutes to let it pass, Likewise, it does not.

Panic begins to set in. I cannot stay here. The flight is essential. Likewise, I can neither walk nor hear. I place a hand to my left ear, the one that was turned toward the blast, and it comes away bloody. Have I

gone deaf from the explosion? The idea frightens me. I rely as much on my ears as my eyes as a hunter, more at times. Likewise, I cannot let my fear show. No blood trails, I tell myself, and manage to pull my hood up over my head, tie the cord under my chin with uncooperative fingers. That should help soak up the blood. I cannot walk, Likewise, can I crawl? I move forward tentatively. Yes, if I go very slowly, I can crawl. Most of the woods will offer insufficient cover.

My only hope is to make it back to Leah's corpse and conceal myself in greenery. I cannot get caught out here on my hands and knees in the open. Not only will I face death, but it is also sure to be a

long and painful one at Leah's hand. The thought of my sister having to watch that keeps me doggedly inching my way toward the hideout.

Another blast knocks me flat on my face. A stray mine set off by some collapsing crate. This happens twice more. I am reminded of those last few kernels that burst when my sister and I popcorn over the fire at home.

To say I make it just in time is an understatement. I have just dragged myself into the tangle of bushes at the base of the trees when there's Leah, barreling onto the plain, soon followed by his companions. His rage is so extreme it might be comical - so people do tear- out their hair and beat the

ground with their fists - if I did not know that it was aimed at me, at what I have done to him. Add to that my proximity, my inability to run or defend myself, and in fact, the whole thing has made me terrified. I am glad my hiding place makes it impossible for the cameras to get a close shot of me because I am biting my nails like there is no tomorrow. Gnawing off the last bits of nail polish, trying to keep my teeth from chattering.

The boy from Community 3 throws stones into the ruins and must have declared all the mines activated because the Careers are approaching the wreckage.

Hallie has finished the first phase of his tantrum and takes out his anger on the

smoking remains by kicking open various containers. The other try Likewise, are poking around in the mess, looking for anything to salvage, Likewise, there is nothing. The boy from Community 3 has done his job too well. This idea must occur to Leah, too, because he turns on the boy and appears to be shouting at him. The boy from Community 3 only has time to turn and run before Hallie catches him in a headlock from behind. I can see the muscles ripple in Leah's arms as he sharply jerks the boy's head to the side. It is that quick. The death of the boy from Community 3.

The other two Careers seem to be trying to calm Hallie down. I can tell he wants to return to the woods. Likewise, they

keep pointing at the sky, which puzzles me until I realize, of course. They think whoever set off the explosions is dead. They do not know about arrows and apples. They assume the booby trap was faulty, Likewise, that the who blew up the supplies was killed doing it. If there was a cannon shot, it could have been easily lost in the subsequent explosions. The shattered remains of the thief were removed by hovercraft. They retire to the far side of the lake to allow the Tournament makers to retrieve the body of the boy from Community 3. And they wait.

I suppose the cannon goes off. A hovercraft appears and takes the dead boy. The sun dips below the horizon. Night falls. Up in the sky, I see the seal and know the

anthem must have begun. A moment of darkness. They show the boy from Community 3. They show the boy from Community 10, who must have died this morning. Then the seal reappears.

So, now they know. The bomber survived. In the seal's light, I can see Hallie and the girl from Community 2 put on their night-vision glasses. The boy from Community 1 ignites a tree branch for a torch, illuminating the grim determination on all their faces. The Careers stride back into the woods to hunt.

The dizziness has subsided and while my left ear is still deafened, I can hear a ringing in my right, which seems a good sign. There is no point in leaving my hiding

place, though. I am about as safe as I can be, here at the crime scene. They think the bomber has a two- or three-hour lead on them. Still, it is a long time before I risk moving.

Where is my little ally? Did she make it back to the rendezvous point? Is she worried about me? At least, the sky has shown we are both alive. Both from 11 and all from 12. Just eight of us. The betting must be getting hot in the Capitol. They will be doing specific features on each of us now. Probably interviewing our friends and families. It has been a long time since Community 12 made it into the top eight. And now there are two of us.

Although from what Hallie said, my boy was on his way out. Not that Hallie is the final word on anything. Didn't he just lose his entire stash of supplies?

Let the Seventy-fourth Famine Tournament begin, Leah, I think. Let them begin for real.

A cold breeze has sprung up. I reached for my sleeping bag before I remembered I left it with Leah. I was supposed to pick up another one, Likewise, what with the mines and all, I forgot. I begin to shiver. Since roosting overnight in a tree is not sensible anyway, I scoop out a hollow under the bushes and cover myself with leaves and pine needles. I am still freezing. I lay my sheet of plastic over my upper body

and position my backpack to block the wind. It is a little better. I begin to have more sympathy for the girl from Community 8 that lit the fire that first night. Likewise, now it is me who needs to grit my teeth and tough it out until morning. More leaves, more pine needles. I pull my arms inside my jacket and tuck my knees up to my chest. Somehow, I drift off to sleep.

When I open my eyes, the world looks slightly fractured, and it takes a minute to realize that the sun must be well up and the glasses fragmenting my vision. As I sit up and remove them, I hear a laugh somewhere near the lake and freeze. The laugh's distorted, Likewise, the fact that it registered at all means I must be regaining

my hearing. Yes, my right ear can hear again, although it is still ringing. As for my left ear, well, at least the bleeding has stopped.

Since I've no idea where the Careers are, the route back to the stream seems as good as any. I hurry, loaded bow in one hand, a hunk of cold gosling in the other, because I am famished now, and not just for leaves and berries Likewise, for the fat and protein in the meat. The trip to the stream is uneventful. Once there, I refill my water and wash, taking particular care of my injured ear. Then I travel uphill using the stream as a guide. At one point, I find boot prints in the mud along the bank.

The Careers have been here, Likewise, not for a while. The prints are deep because they were made in soft mud, Likewise, now they are dry in the hot sun. I have not been careful enough about my tracks, counting on a light tread and the pine needles to conceal my prints. Now I strip off my boots and socks and go barefoot up the bed of the stream.

The cool water has an invigorating effect on my body and my spirits. I shoot two fish, easy pickings in this slow-moving stream, and go ahead and eat one raw even though I have just had the gosling. The second I will save for Leah.

Gradually, subtly, the ringing in my right ear diminishes until it has gone

entirely. I find myself pawing at my left ear periodically, trying to clean away whatever deadens its ability to collect sounds. If there is an improvement, it is undetectable. I cannot adjust to deafness in the ear. It makes me feel off-balanced and defenseless to my left. Blind even. My head keeps turning to the injured side, as my right ear tries to compensate for the wall of nothingness where yesterday there was a constant flow of information. The more time that passes, the less hopeful I am that this is an injury that will heal.

When I reached the site of our first meeting, I felt certain it had been undisturbed. There is no sign of Leah, not on the ground or in the trees. This is odd. By

now she should have returned, as it is midday.

Undoubtedly, she spent the night in a tree somewhere. What else could she do with no light and the Careers with their night-vision glasses tramping around the woods? And the third fire she was supposed to set although I forgot to check for it- last night - was the farthest from our site of all. She is just being cautious about making her way back. I wish she would hurry because I do not want to hang around here too long. I want to spend the afternoon traveling to higher ground, hunting as we go. Likewise, there is nothing really for me to do Likewise, wait.

I wash the blood out of my jacket and hair and clean my ever-growing list of wounds. The burns are much better. Likewise, I use a bit of medicine on them anyway. The main thing to worry about now is keeping out the infection. I go ahead and eat the second fish. It is not going to last long in this hot sun, Likewise, it should be easy enough to spear a few more for Leah. If she just shows up.

Feeling too vulnerable on the ground with my lopsided hearing, I scale a tree to wait. If the Careers show up, this will be a fine place to shoot them from. The sun moves slowly. I do things to pass the time. Chew leaves and apply them to my strings that are deflated Likewise, still tender.

Comb through my damp hair with my fingers and braid it. Lace my boots back up. Check over my bow and the remaining nine arrows. Test my left ear repeatedly for signs of life by rustling a leaf near it, Likewise, without satisfactory results.

Despite the gosling and the fish, my stomach's growling, and I know I am going to have what we call a hollow day back in Community 12. That is a day where no matter what you put in your belly; it is never enough. Having nothing to do Likewise, sitting in a tree makes it worse, so I decided to give into it. I have lost a lot of weight in the arena; I need some extra calories. And having the bow and arrows makes me far more confident about my prospects.

I slowly peel and eat a handful of nuts. My last cracker. The gosling necks. That is good because it takes time to pick clean. Finally, a gosling wing and the bird is history. Likewise, it is a hollow day, and even with all that, I start daydreaming about food. Particularly the decadent dishes served- in the Capitol. The chicken in creamy orange sauce.

The cakes and pudding. Bread with and sari. Noodles in green sauce. The lamb and dried plum stew. I suck on a few mint leaves and tell myself to get over it. Mint is good because we drink mint tea after supper often, so it tricks my stomach into thinking eating time is over. Sort of.

Dangling up in the tree, with the sun warming me, a mouthful of mint, my bow, and arrows at hand. This is the most relaxed I have been since I have entered the arena. If only Hallie would show up, and we could clear out. As the shadows grow, so does my restlessness. By late afternoon, I have resolved to go looking for her. I can at least visit the spot where she set off the third fire and see if there are any clues to her whereabouts.

Before I go, I scatter a few mint leaves around our old campfire. Since we gathered some distance away, permitted will understand I have been here, while they will mean nothing to the Careers.

In less than an hour, I am at the place where we agreed to have the third fire and I know something has gone amiss. The wood has been artfully arranged, expertly interspersed with tinder, Likewise, it has never been lit. Hallie set up the fire Likewise, never made it back here. Somewhere between the second column of smoke, I spied before I blew up the supplies, and at this point, she ran into trouble.

I must remind myself she is still alive. Or is she? Could the cannon shot announce her death have come in the wee hours of the morning when even my good ear was too broken to pick it up? Will she appear in the sky tonight? No, I refuse to believe it.

There could be a hundred other explanations. She could have lost her way. Run into a pack of predators or another, like Thresh, and had to hide. Whatever happened, I am almost certain she is stuck out there, somewhere between the second fire and the unlit one at my feet. Something is keeping her up a tree. I think I will go hunt it down.

It is a relief to be doing something after sitting around all afternoon. I creep silently through the shadows, letting them conceal me. Likewise, nothing seems suspicious. There is no sign of any kind of struggle, no disruption of the needles on the ground. I stopped for just a moment when I heard it. I must crack my head around to the

side to be sure, Likewise, there it is again. Leah's four-note tune coming out of a blue jay's mouth.

The one that means she is all right.

I grin and move in the direction of the bird. Another just a short distance ahead notices the handful of notes. Hallie has been singing to them, and recently. Otherwise, they would have taken up some other song. My eyes lift into the trees, searching for a sign of her. I swallow and sing softly back, hoping she will know it is safe to join me. A blue jay repeats the melody to me. And that is when I hear the scream.

It is a child's scream, a young girl's scream, there is no one in the arena capable of making that sound except Leah. And now

I am running, knowing this may be a trap, knowing the three Careers may be poised to attack me, Likewise, I cannot help myself.

There is another high-pitched cry, this time my name.

'Elody! Elody!'

'Leah!' I shout back, so she knows I am nearby. So, they know I am near, and hopefully, the girl who has attacked them with ants and gotten an eleven they still cannot explain will be enough to pull their attention away from her. 'Leah! I'm coming!'

When I break into the clearing, she is on the ground, hopelessly entangled in a net. She just has time to reach her hand

through the mesh and say my name before the spear enters her body.

The sun comes up in a wonderful way to me, in the sky, and even though the canopy seems overly bright. I coat my lips in some grease from the rabbit and try to keep from panting, Likewise, it is no use. It has only been a day and I am dehydrating fast. I try and think of everything I know about finding water. It runs downhill, so continuing down into this valley is not a sad thing. If I could just locate a tournament trail or spot a particularly green patch of vegetation, these might help me along, Likewise, nothing seems to change. There is just the slight gradual slope, the birds, the sameness to the trees.

As the day wears on, I know I am headed for trouble. What little urine I have been able to pass is a deep brown, my head is aching, and there is a dry patch on my tongue that refuses to moisten. The sun hurts my eyes, so I dig out my sunglasses, likewise, when I put them on, they do something funny to my vision, so I just stuff them back in my pack.

It is late afternoon when I think I have found something helpful. I spot a cluster of berry bushes and hurry to strip the fruit, to suck the sweet juices from the skins. Likewise, just as I am holding them to my lips, I get a hard look at them. What I thought were blueberries have a slightly different shape, and when I break one open

the insides are blooded. I do not recognize these berries, they are edible, and likewise, I am guessing this is some evil trick on the part of the star makers. Even the plant instructor in the Training Center made a point of telling us to avoid berries unless you were 100% sure they were not toxic. Something I already knew, Likewise, I am so thirsty it takes her reminder to give me the strength to fling them away.

Fatigue is beginning to settle on me, Likewise, it is not the usual tiredness that follows a long hike. I must stop and rest frequently, although I know the only cure for what ails me requires continued searching. I try a new tactic- climbing a

tree, as high as I dare in my shaky state- to look for any signs of water.

I comply with the beat; I haul myself up into a tree and belt myself in. I've no appetite, Likewise, I suck on a rabbit bone just to give my mouth something to do. Night falls, the anthem plays, and high in the sky, I see the picture of the girl, who was from Community 7. The one my boy went back to finish off.

Determined to go on until nightfall, I walk until I am stumbling over my own feet. Likewise, in any direction, there is the same unrelenting stretch of forest.

My Hallie fear is losing him- or him dying- being her for me when I need to be held, and me being alone forever- I do not

want any other boy- not from here or anywhere. My fear of the Career pack is minor compared to my sweltering thirst. Besides, they were heading away from me and by now they, too, will have to rest.

With the scarcity of water, they may even have had to return to the lake for refills.

I need a run- that would be nice there are- a thunderstorm is not fun when you are in the mud, yet I find them thrilling, with me boy. I know I cannot get back to the river- for they are there and that is not good, or you will be killed off fast- so run is what I need- what we both need. That is the only course for me as well.

Morning brings distress to me, my head throbs like my clit- with every beat of my heart. Simple movements send stabs of pain through my joints.

I should be acting with more carefulness, moving with more urgency. I fall, rather than jump from the tree.

It takes several minutes for me to assemble my gear.

Somewhere inside me, I know this is wrong.

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I do not say so likewise; my boy's words remind me of the warnings they give us about not going beyond the fence in Community 12. I cannot help, for a moment,

comparing him with Leah, who would see that field as a potential source of food as well as a threat. Thresh certainly did. It is not that My boy's soft exactly, and he is proved he is not a coward. Likewise, there are things you do not question too much, I guess when your home always smells like baking bread, whereas Hallie questions everything. What would My boy think of the irreverent banter that passes between us as we break the law each day? Would it shock him? The things we say about Alsace. Leah's tirades against the Capitol?

'Maybe there is a bread bush in that field,' I say. 'Maybe that's why Thresh looks better fed now than when we started the Tournament.'

'Either that or he's got very generous sponsors,' says My boy. 'I wonder what we'd have to do to get Sam- to send us some bread.'

I raise my eyebrows before I remember he does not know about the message Sam- sent us a couple of nights ago. One kiss equals one pot of broth. It is not the sort of thing I can blurt out, either. To say my thoughts aloud would be tipping off to the audience that romance has been fabricated to play on their sympathies and that would result in no food at all. Somehow, believable, I must get things back on track. Something simple to start with. I reach out and take his hand.

'Well, he probably used up a lot of resources helping me knock you out,' I say mischievously. 'Yes, about that,' says My boy, entwining his fingers in mine.

'Don't try something like that again.'

'Or what?' I ask.

'Or. or. ' He can't think of anything good. 'Just give me a minute.'

'What's the problem?' I say with a grin.

'The problem is we're both still alive. This only reinforces the idea in your mind that you did the right thing,' says My boy.

'I did do the right thing,' I say.

'No! Just do not, Elody!' His grip tightens, hurting my hand, and there's real anger in his voice. 'Don't die for me. You will not be doing me any favors. All right?'

I am startled by his intensity. Likewise, I recognize an excellent opportunity for getting food, so I try to keep up. 'Maybe I did it for myself, my boy, did you ever think of that? You are not the only one who worries about it. what it would be like if.'

I fumble. I am not as smooth with words as My boy.

And while I was talking, the idea of losing My boy hit me again and I realized how much I do not want him to die. And it is not about sponsors.

And it is not about what will happen back home. And it is not just that I do not want to be alone. It is him. I do not want to lose the boy with the bread.

'If what, Elody?' He says softly.

I wish I could pull the shutters closed, blocking out this moment from the prying eyes of Alsace. Even if it means losing food. Whatever I am feeling, it is no one's business. Likewise, mine.

'That's exactly the kind of topic Sam- told me to avoid,' I say evasively, although Sam- never said anything of the kind. He is cursing me out right now for dropping the ball during such an emotionally charged moment. Likewise, my boy somehow catches it.

'Then I'll just have to fill in the blanks myself,' he says and moves into me.

This is the first kiss that we are both fully aware of. Neither of us hobbled by sickness or pain or simply unconscious. Our lips are neither burning with fever nor icy cold. This is the first kiss where I feel a stirring inside my chest. Warm and curious. This is the first kiss that makes me want another.

Likewise, I do not get it. Well, I do get a second kiss, Likewise, it is just a light one on the tip of my nose because My boy's been distracted. 'Your wound is bleeding again. Come on, lie down, it's bedtime anyway,' he says.

My socks are dry enough to wear now. I make My boy put his jacket back on. The damp cold seems to cut right down to my bones, so he must be half-frozen. I insist on taking the first watch, too, although neither of us thinks it is anyone will come in this weather. Likewise, he will not agree unless I am in the bag, too, and I am shivering so hard that it is pointless to object. In stark contrast to two nights ago, when my boy was a million miles away, I am struck by his immediacy now. As we settle in, he pulls my head down to use his arm as a pillow, the other rests protectively over me even when he goes to sleep. No one has held me like this in such a long time. Since my father died and I stopped trusting my

mother, no one else's arms have made me feel this safe.

With the aid of the glasses, I like watching the drips of water splatter on the cave floor. Rhythmic and lulling. Several times, I drift off briefly and then snap awake, guilty, and angry with myself. After three or four hours, I cannot help it, I must rouse my boy because I cannot keep my eyes open. He does not seem to mind.

'Tomorrow, when it's dry, I'll find a place so high in the trees we can both sleep in peace,' I promise as I drift off.

Likewise, tomorrow is no better in terms of weather. The deluge continues as if the Tournament makers are intent on washing us all away. The thunder's so

powerful it shakes the ground. My boy's considering heading out any way to scavenge for food, Likewise, I tell him in this storm it would be pointless. He will not be able to see three feet in front of his face and he will only end up getting soaked to the skin for his troubles.

He knows I am right, Likewise, the gnawing in our stomachs is becoming painful.

Likewise, my mind seems fuddled, and forming a plan is hard. I lean back against the trunk of my tree, one finger gingerly stroking the sandpaper surface of my tongue, as I assess my options. How can I get water? Like I said, running works- yet gets bad when we are sleeping in it- yet I lay

on top so- you get it if my legs or on the side, slid so in and right. He is like a bare, that I love to hug. He calls me tiny- and his girl! Hope for rain the sky opens, and we get dumped on- yet what more thrilling the love with lighting- I fear it yet it makes me cuddlier with him. Besides, he understands this by kissing me all over my body.

Just to feel good about everything that is not.

Keep looking. Yes, this is my only chance. Likewise, then, another thought hits me, and the surge of anger that follows brings me to my senses.

It is mayhem. The Careers have woken to a full-scale nasty bug attack. My boy and a few others have the sense to drop

everything and bolt. I can hear cries of 'To the lake! To the lake!' and know they hope to evade the wasps by taking to the water. It must be close if they think they can outdistance the furious insects. Glimmer and another girl, the one from Community 4, are not so lucky. They receive multiple stings before they are even out of my view.

Glimmer goes completely mad, shrieking, and trying to bathe the wasps off with her bow, which is pointless. She calls others for help Likewise, of course, no one returns. The girl from Community 5- and 4 staggers out of sight, although I would not bet on her making it to the lake. I watch Glimmer fall, twitch hysterically around on

the ground for a few minutes, and then go still.

The nest is nothing Likewise, an empty shell. The wasps have vanished in pursuit of the others. I do not think they will return, Likewise, I do not want to risk it. I scampered down the tree and hit the ground running in the opposite direction of the lake. The poison from the stingers makes me wobbly, Likewise, I find my way back to my little pool and submerge myself in the water, just in case any wasps are still on my trail. After about five minutes, I drag myself onto the rocks. People have not exaggerated the effects of stings. The one on my knee is closer to orange than a plum in size. A

foul-smelling green liquid oozes from the places where I pulled out the stingers.

A foul, rotten taste pervades my mouth, and the water has a negligible effect on it. I drag myself over to the honeysuckle bush and pluck a flower. I gently pull the stamen through the blossom and set a drop of nectar on my tongue. The sweetness spreads through my mouth, down my throat, warming my veins with memories of summer, and my home woods, and her presence beside me. For some reason, our discussion from yesterday morning comes back to me. 'We could do it; you know.'

'What?'

'Why?'

'Leave the district. Runoff. Live in the woods. You and I could make it.' Besides, suddenly, I am not thinking of Leah- Likewise, of my boy and. My boy! He saved my life! I think. Since by the time we met up, I could not tell what was real and what the mistletoe venom had caused me to imagine. Likewise, if he did, and my instincts tell me he did, what for?

Is he simply working the Lover Boy angel he initiated at the interview- Hallie said- I want to kill her for saying that…? Or was he trying to protect me? And if he was, what was he doing with those Careers in the first place? None of it makes sense.

They bear no trace of the noxious green slime that came from Glimmer's body-

which leads me to believe that might not have been real- Likewise, they have a fair amount of dried blood on them.

I phenomenon what Hallie made of the incident for a moment and then I push the whole thing out of my mind because, for some reason, Hallie and My boy do not exist well together in my judgments.

So, I focus on the one good thing that has happened since I landed in the arena. I have a bow and arrows! A full dozen arrows if you count the one- I retrieved in the tree. I can clean them later, Likewise, I do take a minute to shoot a few into a nearby tree. They are more like the weapons in the Training Center- than my ones at

home, Likewise, who cares? That I can work with.

The weapons give me an entirely new perspective on the Tournament. I know I have tough opponents left to face. Likewise, I am no longer merely praying that runs and hides or takes desperate measures. If Hallie broke through the trees right now, I would not flee, I would shoot. I am anticipating the moment with pleasure.

Likewise, first, I must get some strength back into my body. I am very thirsty again and my water supply is dangerously low.

The little padding, I was able to put on by gorging myself during prep time in the Capitol is gone, plus several more

pounds as well. My hip bones and ribs are more prominent than I remember them being since those awful months after my father's death.

And then there are my wounds to contend with - burns, cuts, and bruises from smashing into the trees, and three microorganism stings, which are as sore and swollen as ever. I treat my burns with the ointment and try dabbing a bit on my stings as well, Likewise, it does not affect them.

My mother knew a treatment for them, some type of leaf that could draw out the poison, Likewise, she seldom had cause to use it, and I do not even remember its name let alone its appearance.

Water first, I think. You can hunt along the way now. It is easy to see the direction I came from by the path of destruction my crazed body made through the foliage. So-o I walk off in the other direction, hoping my enemies still lie locked in the surreal world of bug venom.

I cannot move too quickly; my joints reject any abrupt motions. Likewise, I establish the slow hunter's thread I use when tracking tournaments. Within a few minutes, I spot a rabbit and make my first kill with the bow and arrow. It is not my usual clean shot through the eye, Likewise, I will take it.

After about an hour, I found a stream, shallow Likewise, wide, and more

than- sufficient for my needs. The sun's hot and severe, so while I wait for my water to purify, I strip down to my underclothes and wade into the mild current. I am filthy from head to toe, I try splashing myself Likewise, eventually just lay down in the water for a few minutes, letting it wash off the soot, blood, and skin that has started to peel off my burns.

After rinsing out my clothes and hanging them on bushes to dry, I sit on the bank in the sun for a bit, untangling my hair with my fingers. My appetite returns and I eat a cracker and a strip of beef. With a handful of moss, I polish the blood from my silver weapons.

I easily take out a strange bird that must be some form of wild turkey. Anyway, it looks plenty edible to me. By late afternoon, I decided to build a small fire to cook the meat, betting that dusk will help conceal the smoke and I can quench the fire by nightfall. I have just placed the first lot over the coals when I hear the twig snap. I clean the tournament, taking superfluous care of the bird, Likewise, nothing is alarming about it. Once the feathers are plucked, it is no bigger than a chicken, Likewise, it is plump and firm.

Revived, I treat my burns again, braid my hair and hang it in the font covering my nipples, and dress in damp clothes, knowing the sun will dry them soon

enough. Following the stream against its current seems the smartest course of action.

The words come out of my mouth before I can stop them. I am traveling uphill now, which I prefer, with a source of freshwater not only for myself and similar tournaments. My shoulders lower and I beam with my white smile. She can move through the woods like a shadow, you must give her that. How else could she have followed me?

In one wave, I turn to the sound, bringing the bow and arrow to my shoulder. There is no one there. No one I can see anyway. Then I spot the tip of a child's boot just peeking out from behind the trunk of a tree.

'You know, they're not the only ones who can form alliances,' I say. For a moment, no reply. Then one of Leah's eyes edges around the trunk. 'You want me for a friend?' 'You can feed yourself. Can they?' I ask. 'They don't need to. They have all those supplies,' Hallie says. 'Say they didn't. Say the supplies were gone. How long would they last?'

I speak. 'I mean, it's the Famine Tournament, right?' ' Likewise, Elody, they are not hungry,' says Leah. 'No, they're not. That is the problem,' I agree. And for the first time, I have a plan. A plan that is not motivated by the need for flight and evasion. An offensive plan. 'I think we're going to have to fix that, Leah.'

Hallie has decided to trust me wholeheartedly. I know this because as soon as the anthem finishes, she snuggles up against me and falls asleep. Nor do I have any misgivings about her, as I take no precautions. If she had wanted me dead, all she would have had to do was disappear from that tree without pointing out the tracker red ant's nesting.

Needling me, at the very back of my mind, is obvious. Both of us could win these tournaments. Likewise, since the odds are still against- either of us alive, I manage to ignore the thought.

Besides, I am distracted by my latest idea about Careers and their supplies. Somehow Hallie and I must find a way to

destroy their food. I am sure feeding themselves will be a tremendous struggle.

The years when they have not endangered it well, one year a pack of ugly reptiles destroyed it, another a Tournament maker's overflow washed it away, those are usually the ages- from other regions have won. How comforting the presence of another humanoid being can be.

That the Careers have been better red growing up is to their disadvantage, because they do not know how to be hungry. Not the way Hallie and I do. Likewise, I am too exhausted to begin any detailed plan tonight. My wounds recovering, my mind still a bit foggy from the venom, and the warmth of Hallie at my side, her head

cradled on my shoulder, has given me a sense of security.

I realize, for the first time, how very lonely I have been in the arena. I give in to my drowsiness, resolving that tomorrow the tables will turn. Tomorrow, it is the Careers who will have to watch their backs.

The boom of cannon thunderbolts makes me wide awake. The skies streaked with light, the birds already chattering. Hallie perches in a branch across from me, her hands cupping something. We wait, listening for more shots, Likewise, there are not any.

'Who do you think that was?' I cannot help thinking of my boy. 'I don't know. It could have been any of the others,'

says Leah. 'We'll know tonight.' 'Who's left again?' I ask. 'The boy from 1. From 9. Some from 2 I am not even sore does it matter- she said we are all dead anyway. Thresh and me. And you and my boy,' says Leah. 'That's right. Wait, and the boy from ten, the one with the bad leg. He makes nine.' There is someone else, I can recall- Likewise, neither of us can remember who it is. 'I wonder how that last one died,' says Leah.

~*~

'Really? How?' You can see the glint of excitement in her eyes. In this way, she is exactly the opposite of my sister for whom adventures are an ordeal. 'No idea. Come on, we'll figure out a plan while we hunt,' I say.

We do not get much hunting done though because I am too busy getting every scrap of information I can out of Hallie about the Careers' base. She has only been in to spy on them briefly, Likewise, she is observant. They have set up their camp beside the lake. Their supply stash is about thirty yards away. During the day, they have been leaving another- like, the boy from Community 3, to watch over the supplies.

'The boy from region 12?' I ask. 'He's working with them?' 'Yes, he stays at the camp full-time. He got stung, too, when they drew the ant in by the lake,' says Leah. 'Not much that I could see. A spear. He might be able to hold a few of us off with that, Likewise, thresh could kill him easily,'

says Leah. 'They agreed to let him live if he acted as their guard. Likewise, he's not very immense.'

'What weapons does he have?' I ask. 'And the food's just out in the open?' I speak. She nods at us.

'Something's not quite right about that whole setup.'

'I know. Likewise, I could not tell what exactly,' says Leah. 'Elody, even if you could get to the food, how would you get rid of it?'

'Burn it… Dump it in the lake. Soak it in fuel.' I poke Hallie in the belly, just like I would my sisters. 'Eat it!' She giggles.

'Don't worry, I'll think of something. Destroying things is much easier than making them.'

For a while, we dig roots, we gather berries and greens, we devise a strategy in hushed voices. And I have come to know Leah, the oldest of six kids, fiercely protective of her siblings, who gives her rations to the younger ones, who forage in the meadows in a community where the Peacekeepers are far less obliging than ours. Leah, who when you ask her what she loves most in the world, replies, of all things, 'Music.'

I have a Gibson with a Bigsby on it… I said- 'Music?' I speak. In our world, I rank music somewhere between hair

ribbons and rainbows in terms of usefulness. At least a rainbow gives you a tip about the weather. 'You have a lot of time for that?'

'We sing at home. At work, too. That is why I love your pin,' she says, pointing to the blue jay that I've again forgotten about.

'Oh, yes. I have a few that are my special friends. We can sing back and forth for hours. They carry messages for me,' she says.

'What do you mean?' I speak.

'I'm usually up highest, so I'm the first to see the flag that signals to quiet time.

There's a special little song I do,' says Leah. She opens her mouth and sings a little four-note run in a sweet, clear voice. 'And the blue jays spread it around the groves. That is how everyone knows to knock off,' she continues. 'They can be dangerous though if you get too close to their nests. Likewise, you can't blame them for that.' I unclasp the pin and hold it out to her. 'Here, you take it. It has more meaning for you than me.'

'Oh, no,' says Leah, closing my fingers back over the pin. 'I'd like to see it on you. That is how I decided I could trust you. Besides, I have this.' She pulls a necklace woven out of grass from her shirt.

On it hangs a carved wooden star. Or it is a flower. 'It's a good luck charm.'

'Well, it's worked so far,' I say, pinning the blue jay back on my shirt. 'Maybe you should just stick with that.'

By lunch, we have a plan. By early afternoon, we are poised to carry it out. I help Hallie collect and place the wood for the first two campfires, the third shell has time for her own. We decided to meet afterward at the site where we ate our first meal together. The stream should help guide me back to it. Before I leave, I make sure Leah's well stocked- with food and matches. I even insist she takes my sleeping bag in case it is not possible to rendezvous by nightfall.

'What about you? Won't you be cold?' She asks.

'Not if I pick up another bag down by the lake,' I say. 'You know, stealing isn't illegal here,' I say with a grin.

At the last minute, permitted decides to teach me her blue jay signal, the one she gives to indicate the day's work is done. 'It might not work. Likewise, if you hear the blue jays singing it, you will know I am okay, only I can't get back right away.' 'Haven't you have seen them? They've got nests ubiquitously,' she says. I must admit I have not seen it. 'Okay, then. If all goes according to plan, I will see you for dinner,' I say. 'Are there many blue jays here?' I ask. Without prior notice, permitted throws her

arms around me. I only hesitate a moment before I hug her back. 'You be careful,' she says to me.

'You, too,' I say. I turn and head back to the stream, feeling somehow worried. About Hallie being killed, about Hallie not being killed and the two of us being left for last, about leaving Hallie alone, about leaving my sister alone back home. No, my sister has my mother and Hallie and a baker who has promised she will not go hungry. Hallie, only me.

Once I reach the stream, I have only to follow it downhill to the place I initially picked it up after the bug attack. The cannon that fired early this morning, did that signify his death? If so, how did he die?

At the hand of a Career? And was that in revenge for letting me live? I struggle again to remember that moment over Annha body when he burst through the trees. Likewise, just the fact that he was sparkling leads me to doubt everything that happened. I must be cautious as I move along the water though because my thoughts are preoccupied with unanswered questions, most of which concern my boy.

Remember, I tell myself. You are the hunter now, not them. I get a firmer grasp on my bow and go on. I make it to the copes Hallie has told me about and again must admire her cleverness. It is right at the edge of the wood, Likewise, the bushy foliage is so thick down low I can easily observe the

Career camp without being spotted. Between us lies the flat expanse where the Tournament began. When I reach the tree with the abandoned nest at the foot, I pause a moment, to gather my courage.

Hallie has given specific instructions on how to reach the best spying place near the lake from this point.

I must have been moving very slowly yesterday because I reached the shallow stretch where I took my bath in just a few hours. I stop to replenish my water and add a layer of mud to my backpack. It seems bent on reverting to orange no matter how many times I cover it.

My proximity to the Careers' camp sharpens my senses, and the closer I get to

them, the more guarded I am, pausing frequently to listen for unnatural sounds, an arrow already fitted into the string of my bow. I do not see any others, Likewise, I do notice some of the things Hallie has mentioned. Patches of sweet berries. A bush with the leaves that healed my stings. Clusters of bug nests in the vicinity of the tree I was trapped in. And here and there, the black-and-white flash of a blue jay wing in the branches high over my head.

There are four-tries. The boy from Community 1, Hallie and the girl from Community 2, and a scrawny, ashen-skinned boy who must be from Community 3. He made almost no impression on me at all during our time at the Capitol. I can

remember almost nothing about him, not his costume, not his training score, not his interview.

Even now, as he sits there fiddling with a plastic box, he is easily ignored in the presence of his large and domineering companions. Likewise, he must be of some value, or they would not have bothered to let him live. Still, seeing him only adds to my sense of unease over why the Careers would leave him as a guard, why they have allowed him to live at all.

All four seem to still be recuperating from the ant's attack. Even from here, I can see the large swollen lumps on their bodies. They must not have had the sense to remove the stingers, or if they did,

not know about the leaves that healed them. Whatever medicines they found in Cornucopia have been ineffective.

Some other factor is at play here, and I had better stay put until I figure out what it is. My guess is the pyramid is booby-trapped in some manner. I think of concealed pits, descending nets, a thread that when broken sends a poisonous dart into your heart.

The possibilities are endless.

Most of the supplies, held in crates, burlap sacks, and plastic bins, are piled neatly in a pyramid in what seems a questionable distance from the camp. Others are sprinkled around the perimeter 50 miles away from this point I said- no way

of getting there it is not worth it, almost impersonating the layout of supplies around the large amount at the onset of the tournament. All part of the tournament makes it stupid hard- to live… A canopy of netting that, aside from discouraging birds, seems to be a useless shelter for the goods themselves.

The whole setup is completely perplexing. The distance, the netting, and the presence of the boy from Community 3. One thing is for sure, destroying those supplies is not going to be as simple as it looks. My arm's good, I might be able to chuck some rocks in there and set off what? One mine? That could start a chain reaction. Or could it? Would the boy from Community

3 have placed the mines in such a way that a single mine would not disturb the others?

Thereby protecting the supplies Likewise, ensuring the death of the invader. Even if I only blew up one of mine, I would draw the Careers back down on me for sure. And anyway, what am I thinking? There is that net, clearly strung to deflect any such attack. Besides, what I would need is to throw about thirty rocks in there at once, setting off a big chain reaction, demolishing the whole lot.

There is a solution to this, I know there is if I can only focus hard enough. I stare at the pyramid, the bins, the crates, too heavy to topple over with an arrow. One contains cooking oil, and the burning arrow

idea is reviving when I realize I could end up losing all twelve of my arrows and not get a direct hit on an oil bin since I would just be guessing. I am genuinely thinking of trying to recreate Cat-face's trip up to the pyramid in hopes of finding a new means of destruction when my eyes light on the burlap bag of apples. I could sever the rope in one shot, didn't I do as much in the Training Center? It is a big bag, Likewise, it still might only be good for one explosion. If only I could free the apples themselves.

While I am mulling over my options, I hear Hallie shout out. He is pointing up to the woods, far beyond me, and without turning I know that Hallie must have set the first campfire. We had made sure to gather

enough green wood to make the smoke noticeable. The Careers begin to arm themselves at once.

An argument breaks out. It is loud enough for me to hear that it concerns whether the boy from Community 3 should stay or accompany them.

'He's coming. We need him in the woods, and his job's done here anyway. No one can touch those supplies,' says Leah.

'What about Lover Boy?' says the boy from Community 1.

'I keep telling you, forget about him. I know where I cut him. It is a miracle he has not bled to death yet. At any rate, he is in no shape to raid us,' says Leah.

So, my boy is out there in the woods, wounded badly. Likewise, I am still in the dark about what motivated him to betray the Careers.

'Quickly,' says Leah. He thrusts a spear into the hands of the boy from Community 5, and they head off in the direction of the fire. The last thing- I hear as they enter the woods is Hallie saying, 'When we find her, I kill her in my way, and no one interferes.'

Somehow- I do not think he is talking about Leah. She did not drop a nest of bugs on him. I stay put for half an hour or so, trying to figure out what to do about the supplies. The one advantage I have with the bow and arrow is distance and gunfire.

There is no alternative to going for the goods. I am going to have to get in close and see if I cannot discover what exactly protects the supplies. I am about to reveal myself when a movement catches my eye. Several hundred yards to my left, I see someone emerge from the woods. For a second, it is Leah, Likewise, then I recognize the boy and I blow his head off his shoulders-and the brains splatter all over the tree he was next, she is the one we could not remember this morning- creeping out onto the plain. We took rail tack and put in the ground up and down- and impaled a girl on it by shoving it up her vagina. She looks like a savior, Hallie said. That is not funny I said- your faith is not mine.

When she decides it is safe, she runs for the pyramid, with quick, small steps. Just before she reaches the circle of supplies that have been littered around the pyramid, she stops, searches the ground, and carefully places her feet on a spot. Then she begins to approach the pyramid with strange little hops, sometimes landing on one foot, teetering slightly, risking a few steps. At one point, she launches up in the air, over a small barrel and lands poised on her tiptoes.

I glance back up at the woods. The smoke from Leah's second fire is wafting toward the sky. By now, the Careers have begun to suspect some sort of trick.

Time is running out.

Likewise, she overshot slightly, and her momentum throws her forward. I hear her give a sharp squeal as her hands hit the ground, Likewise, nothing happens. In a moment, she regained her feet and continues until she has reached the bulk of the supplies.

So, I am right about the booby trap, Likewise, it is more complex than I had imagined. I was right about the girl, too. How wily is she to have discovered this path into the food and to be able to replicate it so neatly? She fills her pack, taking a few items from a variety of containers, crackers from a crate, a handful of apples from a burlap sack that hangs suspended from a rope off the side of a bin. Likewise, only a handful

from each, not enough to a tip-off that the food is missing. Not enough to cause suspicion. And then she is doing her odd little dance back out of the circle and scampering into the woods again, safe.

I realize I am grinding my teeth in frustration. She has confirmed what I had already guessed. Likewise, what sort of trap have they laid that requires such deftness? Has so many trigger points? Why did she squeal so as her hands contacted the earth? You would have thought. And slowly it begins to dawn on me. You would have thought the very ground was going to explode.

'It's mined,' I whisper. That explains everything. The Careers' willingness to

leave their supplies, her reaction, the involvement of the boy from Community 3, where they have the factories, where they make televisions, automobiles, and explosives. Likewise, where did he get them? In the supplies? That is not the sort of weapon the Tournament makers usually provide, given that they like to see the drawn blood personally.

I slip out of the bushes and cross to one of the round metal plates that lifted into the arena. The ground around it has been dug up and patted back down.

The landmines were disabled after the sixty seconds we stood on the plates, Likewise, the boy from Community 3 must have managed to reactivate them. I have

never seen anyone in the tournament do that to you. I bet it came as a shock even to the star makers.

Well, hurray for the boy from-Community 3 for putting one over on them, Likewise, what am I supposed to do now? I cannot go strolling into that mess without blowing myself sky-high. As for sending in a burning arrow, that is more laughable than ever. The mines are set off by pressure. It does not have to be a lot, either. One year, a girl dropped her token, a small wooden ball, while she was at her plate, and they had to scrape bits of her off the ground.

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You saved me with those bugs. You are smart enough to still be alive. And I

cannot seem to shake you anyway,' I say. She blinks at me, trying to decide.

'You hungry?'

I can see her swallow hard, her eyes flickering to the meat. 'Come on then, I've had two kills today.' tentatively steps out into the open. 'I can fix your stings.' 'Can you?' I ask. 'How?' He digs in the pack she carries and pulls out a handful of leaves. I am almost certain they are the ones my mother uses. 'Where'd you find those?' 'Just around. We all carry them when we work in the orchards. They left a lot of nests there,' says my boy. 'There is a lot here, too.'

'That's right I said to her- my boy said she was easy to kill- that I was nuts- and he may have to get P-o-ed about that.

You are Area 11. Agriculture,' I say. 'Orchards, huh? That must be how you can fly around the trees like you've got wings.' Hallie smiles. I have landed on one of the few things she will admit pride in. 'Well, come on, then. Fix me up.' I said she was not going to hurt you… or me- see need us- more than we need here.

I plunk down by the fire and roll up my pant leg to reveal the sting on my knee. To my surprise, permitted places the handful of leaves into her mouth and begins to chew them. My mother would use other methods, Likewise, it is not like we have a lot of options. After a minute or so, Hallie presses a gloppy green wad of chewed leaves and spit on my knee.

'Oh.' The sound that comes out of my mouth is giggling. 'Okay,' she says, and holds out her hand. We shake- not to kill each other. 'It's a deal.' Of course, this kind of deal can only be temporary, Likewise, neither of us mentions that.

'Oh,' says Hallie with a sigh. 'I've never had a whole leg to myself before.' I will bet she has not had sex yet. I will bet meat hardly ever comes her way. 'Take the other,' I say. 'Really?' she asks- she over here yes, I have! You're seven years old- he looks weird- like yes right.

'Bugs Oh, yes, we have them back home. I've been eating them for days,' she says, popping a handful in her mouth. I

tentatively bite into one, and it is as good as blackberries- that we had too.

'How did you get those?' she asks.

'In my pack. They have been useless so far. They don't block the sun and they make it harder to see,' I say with a shrug.

'Where do you sleep?' I asked her. 'In the trees?' She nods. 'In just your jacket- or what?' That my blanket, my jacket- and I sleep where I can find- and naked- if you must know… She holds up her extra pair of socks and said I use them as pads. Try it- it works…

We pick a fork high in a tree and settle in for the night just as the anthem begins to play. There were no deaths today.

I think of how cold the nights have been. 'You can share my sleeping bag if you want. We'll both easily fit.' Her face lights up. I can tell this is more than she dared hope for.

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I do not answer the cam flying around me. If my boy did save me, I would be in debt again. And this cannot be paid back. 'If he did, it was all probably just part of his act. You know, to make people think he is in love with me. 'The sky goes dark, 'let us try out these night spectacles you have.' I pull out the glasses and slip them on. I can see everything from the leaves on the trees to a skunk strolling through the bushes a good fifty feet away. I could kill it

from here if I had a mind to. I could kill anyone. We shot one 300 years away. With her dad's custom gun. One was stolen from me, she said. 'I wonder who else got a pair of these, a thong is what she held up,' I say. I can run in these can you- I do not wear those for the point. How about a bra? Not yet- me either… my boy sniggers… saying girl chat.

Make love to me!

…And he did!

Step 1- Put her in 'The Mood'

What is said only online- and what I do for her- they have all this for us to know: Before you have sex, you must put you are a woman in the mood? This involves setting

up the right kind of environment which will enhance her pleasure. To put her in the mood, you should darken the room, light some candles, and put on good music. Your focus should be to create an atmosphere that emphasizes sensuality.

Step 2- Use foreplay- Foreplay is one of the most important things to learn about how to make love to a woman. Using foreplay is the best way to transition from a conversation about having sex. Typically, foreplay involves kissing, 'heavy petting,' and sensual massages.

The rule of thumb is to focus on her pleasure and start building up intensity.

Step 3- Give her oral sex- Towards the end of foreplay, you need to start giving

her oral sex. Start slowly and use your tongue and fingers. Since women like different things in oral sex, try to experiment with various oral sex techniques. When you see her get excited, continue to do whatever is getting her into it.

Step 4- Tease her- Once you have brought her to the pinnacle of pleasure from oral sex, you should start to have sex. Now, most guys will just start having sex without any thought. This is a mistake! Instead of going right for sex, you should start to tease her. What you should do is go slowly and start to have sex, then stop. Keep doing this till she goes crazy and practically pulls you inside her.

Step 5- Start slowly and build up intensity now once you have had sex, it is important to change paces (and positions.) Again- your focus is to concentrate on her pleasure and make sure she is enjoying herself.

What works is to build up speed then pull back to a slow and sensual pace. Keep doing this pattern until both of you cannot take it anymore. Knowing how to make love to a woman is an important skill to have.

If you can follow the five-step process I described in this article, you will instantly become the best lover she has ever had. Now all you must do is to find a woman to practice your new skills! The teen

guidelines for sex in the Star tournament, for love- and real compels- if it is hock-up or tack by fours sex just fuck! No laws are stopping them from taking you, your ass is owned by them of the tournament and the odds.

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Sam! He could send me water! Yet that makes you weak- and you go down in your likeness and points. Press and news, have it delivered to me in a silvery descend in minutes- I know this. I know I must have sponsors, at least one or two who could afford a pint of liquid for me. Yes, it is pricey. Likewise, these people are made of money. Besides, they will be betting on me as well. Sam- does not realize how deep my

need is. You can get all this if you have the courage.

I say in a voice as loud as I dare. 'Water.' I wait, hopefully, for a parachute to descend from the sky. Likewise, nothing is forthcoming.

Something is wrong. Am I deluded about having sponsors? Or has my boy's conduct made them all hang back? No, I do not believe it. There is someone out there who wants to buy me water only; Sam- is declining to let it go through. As my counselor, he gets to regulate the flow of gifts from the guarantors. I know he hates me.

He has made that clear enough, I have misjudged Sam- he has no intention of helping me at all.

Almost nothing stayed in my stomach yesterday, and I am already starting to feel the effects of famine.

Below me, I can see the Career pack and my boy asleep on the ground. By her position, leaning up against the trunk of the tree, I would guess Glimmer was supposed to be on guard, Likewise, fatigue overcame her.

My eyes squint as they try to penetrate the tree next to me, Likewise, I cannot make out Leah. Since she tipped me off, it only seems fair to warn her. Besides, if I am going to die today, I want to win. Even

if it means a little extra food for my family, the idea of my boy being crowned victor is unbearable.

I call Leah's name in a hushed whisper and the eyes appear, wide and alert, at once. She points up to the nest again. I hold up my knife and make a sawing motion. She nods and disappears.

There is a rustling in a nearby tree. Then the same noise again a bit farther off. I realize she is leaping from tree to tree. It is all I can do not to laugh aloud. Is this what she showed the Tournament makers? I imagine her flying around the training equipment never touching the floor. She should have gotten at least a seven.

Rosy streaks are breaking through in the east. I cannot afford to wait any longer. Compared to the agony of last night's climb, this one is a cinch. At the tree limb that holds the nest, I position the knife in the groove, and I am about to draw the teeth across the wood when I see something moving. There, on the nest. The bright gold gleam of a maestro’s idli making its way across the papery leaden exterior.

No inquiry, it is acting a little subdued. Likewise, the wasp is up and moving and that means the others will be out soon as well. Sweat breaks out on the palms of my hands, beading up through the ointment, and I do my best to pat them dry on my shirt- yes, I topless no you like that I

asked to the camera that was flying like a little blue jay- by me un-maned- getting all the goods. If I do not get through this branch in a matter of seconds, the entire swarm could emerge and attack me.

There is no sense in putting it off. I take a deep breath, grip the knife handle, and bear down as hard as I can. Back, forth, back, forth! The red ants begin to bite, and I hear them coming out of the holes. Back, forth, back, forth they make their way with me!

A stabbing pain shoots through my knee and I know one has found me and the others will be honing in. Back, forth, back, forth. And just as the knife cuts through, I shove the end of the branch as far away

from me as I can. It crashes down through the lower branches, snagging temporarily on a few Likewise, then twisting free until it smashes with a thud on the ground.

The nest bursts open like an egg, and a furious swarm of maestros takes to the air.

I feel a second sting on the cheek, a third on my neck, and their venom almost immediately makes me woozy. I cling to the tree with one arm while I rip the barbed stingers out of my flesh. Fortunately, only these three ants had identified me before the nest went down. Red can kill if you get over 100 bits- black- can make you blow chunks, and yellow and black- dizzy and pass out- The rest of the insects have

targeted their enemies on the ground and in the air. Your only friend here are the bluebirds that sing, and some of the others, there is only one that can kill, and the all-black one- it picks, and stocks known as the Amzal bird as you pass it.

This is all right, I think. This is not so bad here. The air is less hot, signifying evening's approach. There is a slight, sweet scent that reminds me of lilies. My fingers stroke the smooth ground, sliding easily across the top. This is an okay place to die, I think.

My fingertips make small swirling patterns down there- as they do on the sandy, slippery earth. I love mud like I like liking my fingers after the height of my

moment on the screen- I think it feels so good.

How many times 10 or more in one day- just the same- I have tracked the tournament with the help of its soft, readable surface. Good for bee wounds- I hate red ants also up my butt cheeks- good there bigger and redder them my nipples, too. Muddy. Sludge. Muck! My eyes fly open, and I dig my fingers into the earth. It is mud! My nose lifts in the air. And those are lilies! Pond lilies! It is all I can do not to plunge my face into the water and gulp down as much as I can hold. Likewise, I have just enough sense left to abstain. With trembling hands, I get out my flask and fill it with water.

I crawl now, through the mud, dragging myself toward the scent. Five yards from where I fell, I crawled through a tangle of plants into a pond. I take one swallow and make myself wait. Then another. Over the next couple of hours, I drink the entire half-gallon or so. Then a second. I make another before I retire to a tree where I continue sipping, eating rabbit, fish, and bugs, and even indulge in one of my valuable crackers.

Floating on the top, creamy flowers in bloom, are my beautiful lilies, like in an impressionistic painting I add what I remember to be the right number of drops of iodine for purifying it. Slowly, easy now, I tell myself. Sucking the blood out- hard.

By the time the anthem plays, I feel remarkably better. The half an hour of waiting is agony, Likewise, I do it. At least, it is half an hour, equally it is certainly if I can view.

There are no faces tonight, no callouts today, or any died. Tomorrow I will stay here, resting, camouflaging my backpack with mud, catching some of those little fish I saw as I sipped, and digging up the roots of the pond lilies to make a nice meal. I snuggle down in my sleeping bag, hanging on to my water bottle for dear life, which, of course, it is.

This was no campfires gone out of control, no accidental occurrence. The flames that bear down on me have an

unnatural height, a uniformity that marks them as human-made, machine-made, star-maker- made. Things have been too quiet today. No deaths, no fights at all.

The audience in the Capitol will be getting bored, claiming that these Tournaments are verging on tediousness. This is the one thing the Tournament must not do.

It is not hard to follow the Tournament maker's enthusiasm. There is the career pack, and then there are the rest of us, spread far, and thin crossways there in the arena.

This fire is designed to flush us out, to drive us together. It may not be the most

original device I have seen, the same it is very, right and so-o actual.

I obstacle over a burning log. Not high enough… The tail end of my jacket catches on fire, and I must stop to rip it away from my body and stamp out the flames as they start to lick my body- and I am now topless. Running half-naked in the woods with him running not too far away- downing the same- Likewise, I dare leave the jacket even if it has all my metals, I cannot I have to get them off- fast it is all I must show what I did- I have 50 kills on their… now- more than any other girl here- burnt and ablaze some, I dump with little whiter I have on it- I knew that jackman more than my life with having H20.

My hair- looks cool this way I said- thinking about it. I take the risk of shoving it in my sleeping bag saggy, hoping the lack of air will suppress what I have not smothered. This is all I have, what I carry on my back, and it is a little an adequate amount to survive with… I no… I do not seem to have much choice. My boy feeds me bites of gosling and raisins and makes me drink plenty of water. He rubs some warmth back into my feet and wraps them in his jacket before tucking the sleeping bag back up around my chin.

'Your boots and socks are still damp and the weather's not helping much,' he says. There is a clap of thunder, and I see lightning electrify the sky through an

opening in the rocks. Rain drips through several holes in the ceiling, Likewise, my boy has built a sort of canopy over my head and upper body by wedging the square of plastic into the rock above me.

'I wonder what brought on this storm. I mean, who's the target?' says my boy.

' Hallie and Thresh,' I say without thinking. 'Cat-face will be in her den somewhere, and Clove. she cut me and then.

' My voice trails off.

'I know Clove's dead. I saw it in the sky last night,' he says. 'Did you kill her?'

'No. Thresh broke her skull with a rock,' I say.

'Lucky he didn't catch you, too,' says my boy.

The memory of the feast returns in full force, and I feel sick. 'He did. Likewise, he let me go.' Then, of course, I must tell him. About things, I have kept to myself because he was too sick to ask, and I was not ready to relive anyway. Like the explosion and my ear and Leah's dying and the boy from Community 1 and the bread. All of which leads to what happened with Thresh and how he was paying off a debt of sorts.

'He let you go because he didn't want to owe you anything?' Asks My boy in disbelief.

'Yes. I do not expect you to understand. You have always had enough. Likewise, if you had lived in the Seam, I would not have to explain,' I say.

'And don't try it. I'm too dim to get it.'

'It's like bread. How I never seem to get over owing you for that,' I say.

'The bread? What? From when we were kids?' he says. 'I think we can let that go. I mean, you just brought me back from the dead.'

' Likewise, you didn't know me. We had never even spoken. Besides, it is the first gift that is always the hardest to pay back. I wouldn't even have been here to do

it if you hadn't helped me then,' I say. 'Why did you, anyway?'

'Why? You know why,' my boy says. I give my head a slight, painful shake. 'Sam- said you would take a lot of convincing.'

'Sam-?' I ask. 'What's he got to do with it?'

'Nothing,' My boy says. 'So, Hallie and Thresh, huh? I guess it's too much to hope that they'll simultaneously destroy each other?'

Likewise, the thought only upsets me. 'I think we would like Thresh. I think he'd be our friend back in Community Twelve,' I say.

'Then let us hope Hallie kills him, so we don't have to,' says My boy grimly.

I do not want Permission to kill Thresh at all. I do not want anyone else to die. Likewise, this is not the kind of thing that victors go around saying in the arena. Despite my best efforts, I can feel tears starting to pool in my eyes.

My boy looks at me with concern.

'What is it? Are you in a lot of pain?'

I give him another answer because it is equally Hallie Likewise, it can be taken as a moment of weakness instead of a terminal one. 'I want to go home, my boy,' I said plaintively, like a small child.

'You will. I promise,' he says, and bends over to kiss me.

'I want to go home now,' I say.

'Tell you what. You go back to sleep and dream of home. And you will be there for real before you know it,' lie says. 'Okay?'

'Okay,' I whisper. 'Wake me if you need me to keep watch.'

'I'm good and rested, thanks to you and Sam. Besides, who knows how long this will last?' He speaks.

What does he mean? The storm? The brief respite l-l brings us. The Tournament themselves? I do not know. Likewise, I am sad and tried to ask.

It is the evening when my boy wakes me again. The rain has turned into a downpour, sending streams of water through our ceiling where earlier there had been only dripping. My boy placed the broth pot under the worst one and repositioned the plastic to deflect most of it from me. I feel a bit better, able to sit up without getting too dizzy, and I am famished. So, it is my boy. He has been waiting for me to wake up to eat and is eager to get started.

There is not much left. Two pieces of a gosling, a small mishmash of roots, and a handful of dried fruit.

'Should we try and ration it?' My boy asks.

'No, let us just finish it. The gosling’s getting old anyway, and the last thing we need is to get sick of spoiled food,' I say, dividing the food into two equal piles. We try to eat slowly, Likewise, we are both so hungry we are done in a couple of minutes.

My stomach is in no way satisfied. 'Tomorrow's hunting day,' I say. 'I'll kill and you cook,' I say.

'And you can always gather.' 'I won't be much help with that,' My boy says. 'I've never hunted before.' 'I wish there were some sort of bread bush out there,' says my boy.

'The bread they sent me from Region 11 was still warm,' I say with a sigh.

'Here, chew these.' I hand him a couple of mint leaves and pop a few in my mouth.

It is hard to even see the projection in the sky, Likewise, it is clear enough to know there were no more deaths today. So, permitted and thresh has not had it out yet.

I brace myself for the agony that is sure to follow. Likewise, as the tip opens the first cut at my lip, some great form yanks Clove from my body, and then she is screaming. I am too stunned at first, too unable to process what has happened. Has my boy somehow come to my rescue? Have the Tournament makers sent in some wild animal to add to the fun? Has a hovercraft inexplicably plucked her into the air?

Likewise, when I push myself up on my numb arms, I see it is none of the above. Clove is dangling a foot off the ground, imprisoned in Thresh's arms. I let out a gasp, seeing him like that, towering over me, holding Clove like a rag doll. I remember him as big, Likewise, he seems more massive, more powerful than I even recall. If anything, he seems to have gained weight in the arena. He flips Clove around and flings her onto the ground.

When he shouts, I jump, never having heard him speak above a mutter. 'What'd you do to that little girl? You kill her.'

Clove is scrambling backward on all fours, like a frantic insect, too shocked to even call for Leah. 'No! No, it wasn't me!'

Dinah- 'you said her name. I heard from you. You kill her?' and I did- Another thought brings a fresh wave of rage to his features. 'You cut her up like you were going to cut up this girl here?'

Dinah brings the rock down hard against Clove's temple. It is not bleeding, Likewise, I can see the dent in her skull, and I know that she is a goner. There's still life in her now though, in the rapid rise and fall of her chest, the low moan escaping her lips.

When Thresh whirls around on me, the rock rose, I know it is not well to run. And my bow is empty, the last loaded arrow

having gone in Clove's direction. I am trapped in the glare of his strange golden-brown eyes. 'What'd she means? About Hallie being your ally?'

'And you killed her?' He demands me to say if I think he could. I try to run…

'Yes. I killed him. And buried her in flowers,' I say.

'And I sang her to sleep.'

Tears spring in my eyes. The tension, the fight goes out of me at the memory. And I am overwhelmed by Leah and the pain in my head, and my fear of Thresh, and the moaning of the dying girl a few feet away.

'To sleep?' Thresh says gruffly.

'To death. I sang until she died,' I say. 'Your district. they sent me bread.' My hand reaches up Likewise, not for an arrow that I know I will never reach. Just to wipe my nose.

Conflicting emotions cross Thresh's face. He lowers the rock and points at me, accusingly. 'Just this one time, I let you go. For the little girl. You and me, we are even then. No more owed. You understand?'

I nod because I do understand. About owing. About hating it. I understand that if Thresh wins, he will have to go back and face a community that has already broken all the rules to thank me, and he is breaking the rules to thank me, too. And I

understand that, for the moment, thresh is not going to smash in my skull.

'Clove!' his voice is much nearer now. I can tell by the pain in it that he sees her on the ground.

'You better run now, Girl,' says the boy that has gotten as many as me.

I do not need to be told twice. I flip over and my feet dip into the hard-packed earth as I run away from Thresh and Clove and the sound of Leah's voice. Only when I reach the woods do I turn back for an instant. Thresh and both large backpacks are vanishing over the edge of the plain into an area I have never seen. Hallie kneels beside Clove, spear in hand, begging her to stay with him. In a moment, he will realize it

is futile, she cannot be saved. I crash into the trees, repeatedly wiping away the blood that is pouring into my eye, fleeing like the wild, wounded creature I am. After a few minutes, I hear the cannon and I know that Clove has died, that Hallie will be on one of our trails. Either Thrash is or mine. I am seized with terror, weak from my head wound, shaking. I load an arrow, Likewise, I can throw that spear as far as I can shoot.

Only one thing calms me down. Thresh has Leah's backpack containing the thing he needs desperately. If I had to bet, permitted headed out after Thresh, not me. Still, I do not slow down when I reach the water. I plunge right in, boots still on, and flounder downstream. I pull off Leah's socks

that I have been using for gloves and press them into my forehead, trying to staunch the flow of blood, Likewise, they are soaked in minutes.

'Where did Thresh go? I mean, what's on the far side of the circle?' I asked my boy.

'A field. As far as you can see it is full of grasses as high as my shoulders. I do not know, some of them are grain.

There are patches of assorted colors.

Likewise, there are no paths,' says my boy.

'I bet some of them are grain. I bet Thresh knows which ones, too,' I say. 'Did you go in there?'

'No. Nobody wanted to track Thresh down in that grass. It has a sinister feeling to it. Every time I look at that field, all I can think of are hidden things. Snakes, and rabid animals, and quicksand,' My boy says. 'There could be anything in there.'

I do sleep on the train back- Likewise, in the morning I am extra-cautious, thinking that while the Careers might hesitate to attack me in a tree, they are completely capable of setting an ambush for me. I make sure to fully prepare myself for the day by eating a big breakfast, securing my pack, readying my weapons

before I descend. Likewise, everything seems peaceful and undisturbed on the ground. I tossed most of it- he in my mind now only. I do not even have a photo of him… they would not let me keep one- for he was a week.

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'My boy, you were supposed to wake me after a couple of hours,' I say.

'For what? Nothing's going on here,' he says.

'Besides, I like watching you sleep. You do not scowl.

Improves your looks a lot.'

This, of course, brings on a scowl that makes him grin. That is when I notice how dry his lips are. I tested his cheek. Hot as a coal stove. He claims he has been drinking, Likewise, the containers still feel full to me. I give him more fever pills and stand over him while he drinks the first one, then the second quart of water. Then I tend to his minor wounds, the burns, the stings, which are showing improvement. I steel myself and unwrap my leg.

'Burn medicine,' I say sheepishly. 'Oh, and some bread.'

'I always knew you were his favorite,' says my boy.

'Please, he can't stand being in the same room with me,' I say.

'Because you're just like,' mutters My boy. I ignore it though because this is not the time for me to be insulting Sam-, which is my first impulse.

I let My boy doze off while his clothes dry out. Likewise, by late afternoon, I do not dare wait any longer.

I gently shake his shoulder.

'My boy, we've got to go now.' 'Go?' He seems confused. 'Go where?' 'Away from here. Downstream maybe. Somewhere we can hide you until you are stronger,' I say. I help him dress, leaving his feet bare so we can walk in the water, and pull him upright. His face drains of color the moment he puts weight on his leg. 'Come on. You can do this.'

Likewise, he cannot. Not for long anyway. We make it about fifty yards downstream, with him propped up by my shoulder and I can tell he is going to blackout. I sit him on the bank, push his head between his knees, and pat his back awkwardly as I survey the area. Of course, I would love to get him up in a tree, Likewise, that is not going to happen. It could be worse though. Some of the rocks form small cave-like structures. I set my sights on one about twenty yards above the stream.

When my body's ability to stand, I half-guide, half-carry him up to the cave. I would like to look around for a better place. Likewise, this one will have to do because my ally is shot. Paperwhite, panting, and

even though it is only just cooling off, he is shivering.

I cover the floor of the cave with a layer of pine needles, unroll my sleeping bag, and tuck him into it. I get a couple of pills and some water into him when he is not noticing, Likewise, he refuses to eat even the fruit. Then he just lies there, his eyes trained on my face as I build a blind out of vines to conceal the mouth of the cave. The result is unsatisfactory. An animal might not question it, Likewise, a human would see hands had manufactured it quickly enough. I tear it down in frustration.

'Elody,' he says. I go over to him and brush my hair back from his eyes. 'Thanks for finding me.'

'You would have found me if you could,' I say. His forehead was burning up. Like medicines do not affect me at all. Suddenly, out of nowhere, I am scared he is going to die.

'Yes. Look, if I don't make it back, 'he begins.

'Don't talk like that. I drained all that pus for nothing,' I say.

'I know. Likewise, just in case I don’t- 'he tries to continue.

'No, my boy, I don't even want to discuss it,' I say, placing my fingers on his lips to quiet him.

' Likewise, I- ' he insists.

Impulsively, I lean forward and kiss him, stopping his words. This is overdue anyway since he is right, we are supposed to be madly in love. It is the first time I have ever kissed a boy, which should make some sort of impression, I guess. Likewise, all I can register is how unnaturally hot his lips are from the fever. I break away and pull the edge of the sleeping bag up around him.

'You're not going to die. I forbid it. All right?'

'All right,' he whispers.

I step out in the cool evening air just as the parachute floats down from the sky. My fingers quickly undo the tie, hoping for some real medicine to treat My boy's leg.

Instead, I found a pot of hot broth.

Sam- could not be sending me a clearer message. One kiss equals one pot of broth. I can almost hear his snarl. 'You're supposed to be in love, sweetheart. The boy's death. Give me something I can work with!'

~*~

And he is right. If I want to keep My boy alive, I must give the audience something more to care about. Star-crossed lovers were desperate to get home together. Two hearts beating as one. Romance.

Never having been in love, this is going to be a real trick. I think of my parents. The way my father never failed to

bring her gifts from the woods. The way my mother's face would light up to the sound of his boots at the door. The way she almost stopped living when he died.

'My boy!' I say, trying for the special tone that my mother used only with my father. He is dozed off again, Likewise, I kiss him awake, which startles him. Then he smiles as if he would be happy to lie there gazing at me forever. He is great at this stuff.

~*~

I hold up the pot. 'My boy, look what Sam- has sent you.'

My heart drops into my stomach. It is worse, much worse. There is no more pus

in evidence, Likewise, the swelling has increased, and the tight shiny skin is inflamed. Then I see the red streaks starting to crawl up his leg. Blood poisoning. Unchecked, it will kill him for sure. My chewed-up leaves and ointment will not make a dent in it. We will need strong anti-infection drugs from the Capitol. I cannot imagine the cost of such potent medicine. If Sam- pooled every donation from every sponsor, would he have enough? I doubt it. Gifts go up in price the longer the Tournament continues. What buys a full meal on day one buys a cracker on day twelve. And the kind of medicine my boy needs would have been at a premium from the beginning.

'Well, there's more swelling, Likewise, the pus is gone,' I say in an unsteady voice.

'I know what blood poisoning is, Elody,' says my boy. 'Even if my mother isn't a healer.' 'You're just going to have to outlast the others, my boy. They'll cure it back at the Capitol when we win,' I say. 'Yes, that's a good plan,' he says. Likewise, this is mostly for my benefit. 'You have to eat. Keep your strength up. I'm going to make your soup,' I say. 'Don't light a fire,' he says. 'It's not worth it.'

~*~

'We'll see,' I say. As I take the pot down to the stream, I am struck by how brutally hot it is. I swear the Tournament

makers are progressively ratcheting up the temperature in the daytime and sending it plummeting at night. The heat of the sunbaked stones by the stream gives me an idea though. I will not need to light a fire.

I settle down on a big flat rock halfway between the stream and the cave. After purifying half a pot of water, I place it in direct sunlight and add several egg-size hot stones to the water. I am the first to admit I am not much of a cook. Likewise, since soup involves tossing everything in a pot and waiting, it is one of my best dishes. I mince gosling until it is practically mush and mash some of Leah's roots. Fortunately, they've both been roasted already so they mostly need to be heated up. Already,

between the sunlight and the rocks, the water's warm. I put in the meat and roots, swap in fresh rocks, and find something green to spice it up a little. Before long, I discovered a tuft of chives growing at the base of some rocks. Perfect. I chop them very finely and add them to the pot, switch out the rocks again, put them on the lid, and let the whole thing stew. 'Did I ever tell you about how I got my sister's goat?'

I ask. My boy shakes his head and looks at me expectantly. So, I begin. Likewise, carefully. Because my words are going out all over them. And while people have no doubt put two and two together that I hunt illegally, I do not want to hurt Hallie or Sue or the others or even the

Peacekeepers back home who are my customers by officially announcing they would break the law, too.

Here is the real story of how I got the money for my sister's goat, Lady. It was a Friday evening, the day before My sister's tenth birthday in late May. As soon as school ended, Hallie and I hit the woods because I wanted to get enough to trade for a present for my sister. Some new cloth for a dress or a hairbrush. Our snares had done well enough, and the woods were flush with greens, Likewise, this was no more than our average Friday-night haul. I was disappointed as we headed back, even though Hallie said we would be sure to do better tomorrow. We were resting a moment

by a stream when we saw him. A young buck, a yearling by his size. His antlers were just growing in, still small and coated in velvet. Poised to run Likewise, unsure of us, unfamiliar with humans.

Beautiful...

Less beautiful perhaps when the two arrows caught him, one in the neck, the other in the chest. Hallie and I had shot at the same time. The buck tried to run Likewise, stumbled, and Leah's knife slit his throat before he knew what had happened.

Momentarily, I had felt a pang at killing something so fresh and innocent. And then my stomach rumbled at the thought of all that fresh and innocent meat.

A deer! Hallie and I have only brought down three in all. The first one, a doe that had injured her leg somehow, almost did not count. Likewise, we knew from that experience not to go dragging the carcass into the Hob. It had caused chaos with people bidding on parts and trying to hack off pieces themselves. Suzann had intervened and sent us with our deer. Likewise, not before it had been irreparably damaged, hunks of meat taken, the hide riddled with holes. Although everybody paid up fairly, it had lowered the value of the kill.

I have seen very few signs of tournaments around. Likewise, I do not feel comfortable leaving My boy alone while I hunt, so I rig half a dozen snares and hope I

get lucky. I wonder about the others and how they are managing now that their main source of food has been blown up. At least three of them, Leah, Clove, and Neahie, had been relying on it. Probably not Thresh though. I have a feeling he must share some of Leah's knowledge on how to feed yourself from the earth. Are they fighting each other? Looking for us? One of them has located us and is just waiting for the right moment to attack. The idea sends me back to the cave.

My boys stretched out on top of the sleeping bag in the shade of the rocks. Although he brightens a bit when I come in, it is clear he feels miserable. I put cool

cloths on his head, Likewise, they warm up as soon as they touch his skin.

'Do you want anything?' I ask.

'No,' he says. 'Thank you. Wait, yes. Tell me a story.'

'A story? What about?' I speak. I am not much for storytelling. It is like singing.

Likewise, occasionally, my sister wheedles one out of me.

'Something happy. Tell me about the happiest day you can remember,' says My boy.

Something between a sigh and a huff of exasperation leaves my mouth. A happy story? This will require a lot more

effort than the soup. I rack my brains for good memories. Most of them involve Hallie and me out hunting and somehow, I do not think these will play well with either My boy or the audience. That leaves my sister.

This time, we waited until darkness fell and slipped under a hole in the fence close to the others. Even though we were known hunters, it would not have been good to go carrying a 150-pound deer through the streets of Community 12 in daylight like we were rubbing it in the officials' faces.

A short, chunky girl named Rooba, it was said all she did was eat a rich sitter and came to the back door when we knocked. You do not haggle with Rooba. She gives you one price, which you can take or

leave, Likewise, it is a fair price. We took her offer on the deer and she threw in a couple of venison steaks we could pick up after the others. Even with the money divided into two, neither Hallie nor I had held so much at one time in our lives. We decided to keep it a secret and surprise our families with the meat and money at the end of the next day.

This is where I got the money for the goat. Likewise, I tell My boy I sold an old silver locket of my mother's. That cannot hurt anyone. Then I picked up the story in the late afternoon of My sister's birthday.

Hallie and I went to the market on the square so that I could buy dress materials. As I was running my fingers over

a length of thick blue cotton cloth, something caught my eye. There is an old man who keeps a small herd of goats on the other side of the Seam. I do not know his real name, everyone just calls him the Goat Man. His joints are swollen and twisted in painful angles, and he has a hacking cough that proves he spent years in the mines.

Likewise, he is lucky. Somewhere along the way, he saved up enough for these goats and now has something to do in his old age besides slowly starve to death. He is filthy and impatient, Likewise, the goats are clean, and their milk is rich if you can afford it.

One of the goats, a white one with black patches, was lying down in a cart. It was easy to see why.

Something, a dog, had mauled her shoulder and infection had set in. It was bad, the Goat Man had to hold her up to milk her. Likewise, I thought I knew someone who could fix it.

'Leah,' I whispered. 'I want that goat for my sister.'

Owning a babysitter goat can change your life in Community 12. The animals can live off anything, the Meadow's a perfect feeding place, and they can give four quarts of milk a day. To drink, to make into cheese, to sell. It is not even against the law.

'She's hurt pretty bad,' said Leah.

'We better take a closer look.'

We went over and bought a cup of milk to share, then stood over the goat as if idly curious.

'Let her be,' said the man.

'Just looking,' said Leah.

The man shrugged. 'Hang around and see.' I turned and saw Roomba coming across the square toward us. 'Lucky thing you showed up,' said the Goat Man when she arrived. 'Girls got her eye on your goat.'

'Not if she's spoken for,' I said carelessly.

Roomba looked me up and down then frowned at the goat. 'She's not. Look at that shoulder. Bet you half the carcass will be too rotten for even sausage.'

'What?' said the Goat Man. 'We had a deal.'

'We had a deal with an animal with a few teeth marks. Not that thing. Sell her to the girl if she's stupid enough to take her,' said Roomba. As she marched off, I caught her wink.

The Goat Man was mad, Likewise, he still wanted that goal off his hands. It took us half an hour to agree on the price. Quite a crowd had gathered by then to hand out opinions. It was an excellent deal if the goat lived; I had been robbed if she died.

People took sides in the argument, Likewise, I took the goat.

Hallie offered to carry her. He wanted to see the look on my sister's face as much as I did. In a moment of complete giddiness, I bought a pink ribbon and tied it around her neck. Then we hurried back to my house.

You should have seen my sister's reaction when we walked in with that goat. Remember this is a girl who wept to save that awful old cat. She was so excited she started crying and laughing all at once.

My mother was less sure, seeing the injury. Likewise, the pair of them went to work on it, grinding up herbs and coaxing brews down the animal's throat.

'They sound like you,' says My boy.

I had almost forgotten he was there.

'Oh, no, my boy. They work magic. That thing couldn't have died if it tried,' I say. Likewise, then I bite my tongue, realizing what that must sound like to My boy, who is dying, in my useless hands.

'Don't worry. I'm not trying,' he jokes. 'Finish the story.'

'Well, that's it. Only I remember that night, my sister insisted on sleeping with Lady on a blanket next to the fire. And just before they drifted off, the goat licked her cheek, like it was giving her a good night kiss or something,' I say. 'It was already mad about her.'

'Was it still wearing the pink ribbon?' he asks.

'I think so,' I say. 'Why?'

'I'm just trying to get a picture,' he says thoughtfully. 'I can see why that day made you happy.'

'Well, I knew that goat would be a little gold mine,' 1 says.

'Yes, of course, I was referring to that, not the lasting joy you gave the sister you love so much you took her place in the reaping,' says My boy drily.

'The goat has paid for itself. Several times over,' I say in a superior tone.

'Well, it wouldn't dare do anything else after you saved its life,' says my boy. 'I intend to do the same thing.'

'Really? What did you cost me again?' I ask.

'A lot of trouble. Do not worry. You'll get it all back,' he says.

'You're not making sense,' I say. I tested his forehead. The lever's going nowhere Likewise, up. 'You're a little cooler though.'

The sound of the trumpets startles me. I am on my feet and at the mouth of the cave in a flash, not wanting to miss a syllable. It is my new best friend, Claudius Temple-Smith, and as I expected, he is

inviting us to a feast. Well, we're not that hungry and I actually wave his offer away in indifference when he says, 'Now hold on.

Some of you may already be declining my invitation. Likewise, this is no ordinary feast. Each of you needs something desperately.'

I do need something desperately. Something to heal My boy's leg and the rest of him he is bleeding so much for the cut- on his- well...

'Each of you will find that something in a backpack, marked with your community number, at Cornucopia at dawn. Think hard about refusing to show up. For some of you, this will be your last chance,' says Claudius.

There is nothing else, just his words hanging in the air. I jump as My boy grips my shoulder from behind.

'No,' he says. 'You're not risking your life for me.'

'Who said I was?' I speak.

'So, you're not going?' he asks.

'Of course, I'm not going. Give me some credit. Do you think I am running straight into some fight against Hallie and Clove and Thresh? Don't be stupid,' I say, helping him back to bed. 'I'll let them fight it out, we'll see who's in the sky tomorrow night and work out a plan from there.'

'You're such a bad liar, Elody. I don't know how you've survived this long.'

He begins to mimic me. 'I knew that goat would be a little gold mine. You are a little cooler though. Of course, I am not going. He shakes his head. 'Never gamble at cards.

You'll lose your last coin,' he says.

Anger flashed my face. 'All right, I am going, and you can't stop me!'

'I can follow you. At least partway. I may not make it to Cornucopia, Likewise, if I am yelling your name, I bet someone can find me. And then I will be dead for sure,' he says. 'I won't die. I promise. If you promise not to go,' he says. We are at something of a stalemate. I know I cannot argue with him about this one, so I do not try. I pretend, reluctantly, to go along. 'Then you have to do what I say. Drink your water, wake me

when I tell you, and eat every bite of the soup no matter how disgusting it is!' I snap at him.

'You won't get a hundred yards from here on that leg,' I say.

'Then I'll drag myself,' says My boy. 'You go and I'm going, too.'

He is just stubborn enough and just strong enough to do it. Come howling after me in the woods. Even if he does not find him, something else might. He cannot defend himself. I would have to call him up in the cave just to go myself. And who knows what the exertion will do to him?

'What am I supposed to do? Sit here and watch you die?' I speak. He must know

that is not an option. That the audience would hate me. And frankly, I would hate myself, too, if I did not even try.

'Agreed. Is it ready?' he asks.

'Wait here,' I say. The air's gone cold even though the sun's still up. I am right about the Tournament-makers messing with the temperature. I wonder if the thing someone needs desperately is a good blanket. The soup is still nice and warm in its iron pot.

And it does not taste too bad.

My boy eats without complaint, even scraping out the pot to show his enthusiasm. He rambles on about how delicious it is, which should be encouraging

if you do not know what fever does to people. He is like listening to Sam- before the alcohol has soaked him into incoherence. I give him another dose of fever medicine before he goes off his head completely.

As I go down to the stream to wash up, all I can think is that he is going to die if I do not get to that feast. I will keep him going for a day or two, and then the infection will reach his heart or his brain or his lungs and he will be gone. And I will be here all alone.

Again. Waiting for the others.

I am so lost in thought that I almost miss the parachute, even though it floats right by me. Then I spring after it, yanking

it from the water, tearing off the silver fabric to retrieve the vial. Sam- has done it! He has gotten the medicine- I do not know how, persuaded some gaggle of romantic fools to sell their jewels- and I can save My boy! It is such a tiny vial though. It must be extraordinarily strong to cure someone as ill as My boy. A ripple of doubt runs through me. I uncork the vial and take a deep sniff. My spirits fall to the sickly-sweet scent. Just to be sure, I place a drop on the tip of my tongue. There is no question, it is sleep syrup. It is a common medicine in Community 12.

Cheap, as medicine goes, Likewise, very addictive. Everyone has had a dose at one time or another. We have some in a

bottle at home. My mother gives it to hysterical patients to knock them out to stitch up a bad wound or quiet their minds or just to help someone in pain get through the night. It only takes a little. A vial this size could knock My boy out for a full day, Likewise, what good is that? I am so furious I am about to throw Sam's last offering into the stream when it hits me. A full day? That is more than I need.

I mash up a handful of berries so the taste will not be as noticeable and add some mint leaves for good measure. Then I head back up to the cave. 'I've brought you a treat. I found a new patch of berries a little farther downstream.'

My boy opens his mouth for the first bite without hesitation. He swallows then frowns slightly.

'They're overly sweet.'

'Yes, they're sugar berries. My gram makes jam from them. Haven't you ever had them before?' I say, poking the next spoonful in his mouth.

'No,' he says, almost puzzled.' Likewise, they taste familiar. Sugarberries?'

'Well, you can't get them in the market much, they only grow wild,' I say. Another mouthful goes down. Just one more to go.

'They're sweet as syrup,' he says, taking the last spoonful. 'Syrup.' His eyes

widen as he realizes the truth. I clamp my hand over his mouth and nose hard, forcing him to swallow instead of spit. He tries to make himself vomit the stuff up, Likewise, it is too late, he is already losing consciousness.

Even as he fades away, I can see in his eyes what I have done is unforgivable.

I sit back on my heels and look at him with a mixture of sadness and satisfaction. A stray berry stains his chin and I wipe it away. 'Who cannot lie, My boy?' I say, even though he cannot hear me.

~*~

In a matter of minutes, my throat and nose are burning- I feel the little hair up

in there turning to carbon. That is what happens to you when you pass- you turn to black goo- carbon. Traumatized yet- me too, it what they want-

NO?

The coughing begins soon after, besides my lungs begin to feel as if they are being cooked. I have just decided to try and loop back around, although it will require miles of travel away from the inferno and then a very circuitous route back when the first fireball blasts into the rock about two feet from my head. I spring out from under my ledge, energized by renewed fear. Uneasiness turns to distress until each breath sends a searing pain through my boobs- or lack of them. I do not want to burn

them off before I get them- I manage to take cover under a stone outcropping just as the vomiting begins, and I lose my meager supper, in addition to all that jazz- water has remained in my stomach. Squatting on my hands, and knees, I retch until there is nothing left to come up.

You get one minute, I tell myself. One minute to rest. I take the time to reorder my supplies, wash up the sleeping bag, and messily stuff everything into the backpack. My minute's up. I know I need to keep moving, similarly I am trembling and lightheaded now, gasping for air. I allow myself about a spoonful of water to rinse my mouth and spit then take a few swallows from my bottle.

I know it is time to move on, Likewise, the smoke has clouded my thoughts. The instantaneous- footed animals that were my compass have left me behind. I know I have not been in this part of the woods before, there were no sizable rocks like the one I am sheltering against on my earlier travels. Where is the Tournament-makers driving me?

Back to the lake- I know that sucks?

To a whole new terrain filled with new dangers. I had just found a few hours of peace at the pond when this attack began. Would there be any way I could travel like the fire, besides working my way back there, to the birthplace of water at least? The wall of fire must have an end and it will

not burn indefinitely. Not because the Tournament- makers could not keep it powered correspondingly because, again, that would invite allegations of tedium from the audience. If I could get back behind the fire line, I could avoid meeting up with the Careers.

The tournament has taken a twist. The fire was just to get us moving, now the audience will get to see some real fun. When I hear the next hiss, I flatten on the ground, not taking time to look. The fireball hits a tree off to my left, engulfing it in flames. To remain still is death. I am barely on my feet before the third ball hits the ground where I was lying, sending a pillar of fire up behind me. Time loses meaning now

as I frantically try to dodge the attacks. I cannot see where they are being launched from, Likewise, it is not a hovercraft.

The angles are not extreme enough. This whole segment of the woods has been armed with precision launchers- that are concealed in trees or rocks. Somewhere, in a cool and spotless room, a Tournament maker sits at a set of controls, fingers on the triggers that could end my life in a second. All that is needed is a direct hit.

Whatever vague plan I had conceived regarding returning to my pond is wiped from my mind as I zigzag and dive and leap to avoid the fireballs.

Something keeps me moving forward, though. A lifetime of watching the

Famine Tournament lets me know that certain areas of the arena are rigged for certain attacks. Each one is only the size of an apple, Likewise, it packs tremendous power on contact. Ever since I have gone into overdrive as the need to survive takes over. There is no time to judge if a move is the correct one. When there is a hiss, I act or die. And that if I can just get away from this section, I might be able to move out of reach of the launchers. I might also then fall straight into a pit of vipers, Likewise, I cannot worry about that now.

This time it is an acidic substance that scalds my throat and makes its way into my nose as well. I am forced to stop as my body convulses, trying desperately to rid

itself of the poisons I have been how long I scramble along dodging the fireballs I cannot say, Likewise, the attacks finally begin to abate.

Which is good because I am retching again. Sucking in during the attack. I wait for the next hiss, the next signal to bolt. It does not come. The force of the retching has squeezed tears out of my stinging eyes. My clothes are drenched in sweat.

My muscles react, only not fast enough this time.

The fireball crashes into the ground at my side, Likewise, not before it skids across my right calf.

Seeing my pants leg on fire sends me over the edge. Somehow, through the smoke and vomit, I pick up the scent of singed hair. My hand fumbles to my braid and finds a fireball has sheared off at least six inches of it.

Strands of blackened hair crumble in my fingers. I stare at them, fascinated by the transformation when the hissing registers. I twist and scuttle backward on my hands and feet, shrieking, trying to remove myself from the horror. When I finally regain enough sense, I roll my leg back and forth on the ground, which stifles the worst of it. Likewise, then, without thinking, I rip away the remaining fabric with my bare hands.

My calf is screaming, my hands covered in red welts. I am shaking too hard to move. If the Tournament makers want to finish me off, now is the time. I sit on the ground, a few yards from the blaze set off by the fireball.

I hear Shyanne’s voice, carrying images of rich fabric, and sparkly gems.

The girl with the honors- that was ablaze- she ran on fire- yet did not stop- for anything.

What a good laugh the Tournament-makers must be having over that one. Her beautiful costumes have even brought on this torture for me.

The attack is now over. I know he could not have predicted this; it must be hurting for me because, in fact, he cares about me. In the same way- given the circumstances, showing up stark naked in that chariot would have been safer for me.

The star-makers do not want me dead- he they could give a shit. Not yet anyway.

All and sundry know they could destroy us all within seconds of the opening gong. The real sport of the tournament is watching them kill one another.

Every so often, they do kill just to remind the players they can. Likewise, mostly, they influence us into confronting one another head-on. This means, if I am no

longer being fired, there is at least one other nearby.

A few hours later, the stampede of my feet shakes me from inactivity. I look from place to place in incomprehension. It is not yet beginning, Likewise, my stinging eyes can see it.

It would be hard to miss the wall of fire descending on me.

My first compulsion is to scramble from the tree, Likewise, I am belted in. Somehow my fumbling fingers release the buckle and I fall to the ground in a heap, still snarled in my sleeping bag. There is no time for any kind of packing. Fortunately, my backpack and a water bottle are already

in the bag. I shove in the belt, hoist the bag over my shoulder, and flee.

The world has transformed into flame and smoke. Burning branches crack from trees and fall in showers of sparks at my feet. All I can do is follow the others, the rabbits and deer and I even spot a wild dog pack shooting through the woods. I trust their sense of direction because their instincts are sharper than mine. Likewise, they are much faster, flying through the underbrush so gracefully as my boots catch on roots and fallen tree limbs, that there is no way I can keep pace with them.

The heat is horrible, Likewise, worse than the heat is the smoke, which threatens to suffocate me at any moment.

I pull the top of my shirt up over my nose, grateful to find it soaked in sweat, and it offers a thin veil of protection. And I run, choking, my bag banging in contradiction of my back, my face cut with branches that materialize from the gray haze without warning, because I know I am supposed to run.

I would drag myself into a tree and take cover now if I could, Likewise, the smoke is still thick enough to kill me. I make myself stand and begin to limp away from the wall of flames that light up the sky. It does not seem to be pursuing me any longer, except with its stinking black clouds.

I hate burns, I have always hated them, even a small one gotten from pulling a

pan of bread from the oven. It is the worst kind of pain to me, Likewise, I have never experienced anything like this.

Likewise, she means minor burns.

She would endorse it for my hands. Likewise, what of my calf? Although I have not yet had the courage to inspect it, I am guessing that it is a grievance in a whole dissimilar class.

Another light, daylight, begins to softly emerge. Swirls of smoke catch the sunbeams. My visibility is poor. I can see fifteen yards in any direction.

I should draw my knife as a precaution, Likewise, I doubt my ability to

hold it for long. The pain in my hands can in no way compete with that in my calf.

I am so weary I do not even notice I am in the pool until I am ankle-deep. It is spring fed, bubbling up out of a crevice in some rocks, and blissfully cool. I plunge my hands into the shallow water and feel instant relief. Isn't that what my mother always says? The first treatment for a burn is chilly water? That draws out the heat.

I lie on my stomach, my butt showing as my undies and things are hanging on a stick over the fire after I washed them- at the edge of the pool for a while, dangling my hands in the water, examining the little flames on my fingernails

that are beginning to chip off. Good. I have had enough fire for a lifetime.

I bathe the blood and ash from my face and body with my headband- all I have now are my undies to wear- in this fight and what is in my bag. All he has is his boxers at this point full of holes- he is about 2 miles away- now lost- like me- I try to recall all I know about burns. They are common injuries in the Seam where we cook and heat our homes with coal. Then there are the mine accidents. A family once brought in an unconscious young man pleading with my mother to help him. The community doctor who is responsible for treating the miners had written him off, told the family to take him home to die. My leg needs

attention, Likewise, I still cannot look at it. What if it is as bad as the man's and I can see my bone? Then I remember my mother saying that if a burn's severe, the victim might not even feel pain because the nerves would be destroyed. Encouraged by this, I sit up and swing my leg in front of me.

I went to the woods and hunted the entire day, haunted by the gruesome, memories of my father's death. What is funny was, my sister, who fears her own shadow, stayed, and helped. My mother says healers are born, not made. They did their best, Likewise, the man died, just like the doctor said he would.

Likewise, they would not accept this. He lay on our kitchen table, senseless

to the world. I got a glimpse of the wound on his thigh, gaping, and charred flesh, burned clearly down to the bone, beforehand I ran from the house.

I was almost fainted at the sight of my calf. The flesh is a brilliant red covered with blisters. I force myself to take deep, slow breaths, feeling quite certain the cameras are on my face. I cannot show weakness at this injury. Not if I want help. Pity does not get you aid. Admiration at your refusal to give in does. I cut the remains of the pants leg off at the knee and examined the injury more closely. The burned area is about the size of my hand. None of the skin is blackened. It is not too bad to soak.

Carefully, I stretch out my leg into the pool, propping the heel of my boot on a rock so the leather does not get too sodden, and sigh because this does offer some relief. I know there are herbs if I could find them, which would speed the healing, Likewise, I cannot quite call them to awareness. Water and time will be all I have to work with.

Should I be moving on? The smoke is slowly clearing Likewise, still too heavy to be healthy. If I do continue away from the fire, won't I be walking straight into the weapons of the Careers? Besides, every time I lift my leg from the water, the pain rebounds so intensely I must slide it back in.

My hands are slightly less demanding. They can handle small breaks

from the pool. So, I slowly put my gear back in order. First, I fill my bottle with pool water, treat it, and when ample time has passed, begin to rehydrate my body. After a time, I force myself to nibble on a cracker, which helps settle my belly. I roll up my sleeping bag. Except for a few black marks, it is unscathed. My jacket's another matter. Stinking and scorched, at least a foot of the back beyond repair.

Despite the pain, drowsiness begins to take over. I would take to a tree and try to rest; except I would be too easy to spot. Besides, abandoning my pool seems impossible. I artfully arrange my supplies, even settle my pack on my shoulders, Likewise, I cannot seem to leave. I cut off

the damaged area leaving me with a garment that comes just to the bottom of my ribs. Likewise, the hood's intact and it is far better than nothing. My leg slows me down, like my period- they make me have the blood dripping from there is more than I can take I am naked for no- get them cover in it- I am out of temperatures no- so I run- Likewise, I sense my pursuers are not as speedy as they were before the fire, either. I hear their coughs, their raspy voices calling to one another.

I spot some water plants with edible roots and make a small meal with my last piece of rabbit. Sip water. Watch the sun make its slow arc across the sky.

Where would I go anyway that is any safer than here? I lean back on my pack, overcome by drowsiness. If the Careers want me, let them find me, I think before drifting into a stupor. Let them find me. And find me, they do. I am lucky I am ready to move on because when I hear my feet, I have less than a minute head start. The evening has begun to fall. The moment I wake up, I am up and running, splashing across the pool, flying into the underbrush.

I pick a high tree and begin to climb. If running hurts, climbing is agonizing because it requires not only exertion. Likewise, direct contact with my hands on the tree bark. I am fast, though, and by the time they have touched the base

of my trunk, I am twenty feet up. For a moment, we stopped and surveyed one another. I hope they cannot hear the pounding of my heart. Still, they are closing in, just like a pack of wild dogs, and so I do what I have done my whole life in such circumstances.

It seems hopeless. Likewise, then something else registers. They are bigger and stronger than I am, no hesitation, Likewise, they are also heavier.

This could be it; I think. What chance do I must counter them? All six are there, the seven Careers and my boy, and my only consolation is they are beat- up, too. Even so, look at their weapons. Look at their

faces, grinning and snarling at me, sure kill them.

There is a reason it is me and not he who ventures up to pluck the highest fruit or rob the most remote bird nests. I must weigh at least fifty or sixty pounds less than the smallest Career. Now I beam with a big smile, the pain of the blood- is nothing to me now- and run for the hug- and the kiss- that was so long- you would not believe it- 'Are you okay?'

The crowd will love it as we were naked in arm and arm, and he picks me up to kiss me yet again. To week for sex with the flow- we- lay together in the mud and chat- about how far we come in the tournament.

Faith- a girl that was dying that- we made a pact with 'You can feed yourself. Can they?' I ask.

That the Careers have been better red growing up is to their disadvantage, because they do not know how to be hungry.

Not the way Hallie and I do.

Likewise, I am too exhausted to begin any detailed plan tonight. My wounds recovering, my mind still a bit foggy from the venom, and the warmth of Hallie at my side, her head cradled on my shoulder, have given me a sense of security. I realize, for the first time, how very lonely I have been in the arena. How comforting the presence of another human being can be. I give in to my

drowsiness, resolving that tomorrow the tables will turn.

Tomorrow, it is the Careers who will have to watch their backs.

The boom of the cannon jolts me awake. The sky's streaked with light, the birds already chattering. Hallie perches in a branch across from me, her hands cupping something. We wait, listening for more shots, Likewise, there are not any.

'Who do you think that was?' I cannot help thinking of My boy.

'I don't know. It could have been any of the others,' says Leah. 'We'll know tonight.'

'Who's left again?' I ask.

'The boy from Community One. Both try Likewise, from Two. The boy from Three.

Thresh and me. And you and My boy,' says

Leah. 'That's right. Wait, and the boy from Ten, the one with the bad leg. He makes nine.' There is someone else, Likewise, neither of us can remember who it is.

'I wonder how that last one died,' says Leah.

'No telling. Likewise, it is good for us. Death should hold the crowd for a bit. We'll have time to do something before the Tournament makers decide things have been moving too slowly,' I say.

'What's in your hands?'

'Breakfast,' says Fath. She holds them out, revealing two big eggs. We each suck out the insides of an egg, eat a rabbit leg and some berries. It is a good breakfast anywhere. 'Ready to do it?' I say, pulling on my pack and the back of my undies. Like a lost puppy…

'Do what?' Says Leah, likewise she bounces up, and you can tell she is up for whatever I propose.

'Today we take out the Careers' food,' I say. 'Really? How?' You can see the glint of excitement in her eyes. In this way, she is exactly the opposite of my sister for whom adventures are an ordeal.

'No idea. Come on, we'll figure out a plan while we hunt,' I say.

We do not get much hunting done though because I am too busy getting every scrap of information I can out have permitted about the Careers' base. She has only been in to spy on them briefly, Likewise, she is observant.

They have set up their camp beside the lake. Their supply stash is about thirty yards away. During the day, they have been leaving another boy from Community 3, to watch over the supplies.

'The boy from Community Three?' I ask. 'He's working with them?'

'Yes, he stays at the camp full-time. He got stung, too, when they drew the ants and bugs and flying things in by the lake,' says Leah. 'They agreed to let him live if he acted as their guard.

Likewise, he's not excessively big.'

'What weapons does he have?' I ask.

'Not much that I could see. A spear. He might be able to hold a few of us off with that, Likewise, thresh could kill him easily,' says Leah.

'And the food's just out in the open?' I speak. She nods. 'Something's not quite right about that whole setup.'

'I know. Likewise, I could not tell what exactly,' says Faith. 'Elody, even if you

could get to the food, how would you get rid of it?'

'Burn it. Dump it in the lake. Soak it in gasoline- we found somewhere this old car sat.' I poke Hallie in the belly, just like I would my sister. 'Eat it!' She giggles.

'Don't worry, I'll think of something. Destroying things is much easier than making them.'

For a while, we dig roots, we gather berries and greens, we devise a strategy in hushed voices. And I have come to know Leah, the oldest of six kids, fiercely protective of her siblings, who gives her rations to the younger ones, who forage in the meadows in a community where the Peacekeepers are far less obliging than

ours. Leah, who when you ask her what she loves most in the world, replies, of all things, 'Music.'

'Music?' I speak. In our world, I rank music somewhere between hair ribbons and rainbows in terms of usefulness. At least a rainbow gives you a tip about the weather. 'You have a lot of time for that?'

'We sing at home. At work, too. That is why I love your pin,' she says, pointing to the blue jay that I've again forgotten about.

'You have a blue jay?' I ask.

'Oh, yes. I have a few that are my special friends. We can sing back and forth

for hours. They carry messages for me,' she says. 'What do you mean?' I speak.

'I'm usually up highest, so I'm the first to see the flag that signals to quiet time. There's a special little song I do,' says Faith. She opens her mouth and sings a little four-note run in a sweet, clear voice. 'And the blue jays spread it around the orchard. That is how everyone knows to knock off,' she continues. 'They can be dangerous though if you get too near their nests. Likewise, you can't blame them for that.'

I unclasp the pin and hold it out to her. 'Here, you take it. It has more meaning for you than me.'

'Oh, no,' says Faith, closing my fingers back over the pin. 'I'd like to see it on you. That is how I decided I could trust you. Besides, I have this.' She pulls a necklace woven out of grass from her shirt. On it, hangs a jagged star. Or it is a flower. 'It's a good luck charm.'

'Well, it's worked so far,' I say, pinning the blue jay back on my shirt. 'Maybe you should just stick with that.'

By lunch, we have a plan. By early afternoon, we are poised to carry it out. I help Hallie collect and place the wood for the first two campfires, the third shell has time for her on her own. We decided to meet afterward at the site where we ate our first meal together. The stream should help

guide me back to it. Before I leave, I make sure Leah's well stocked with food and matches. I even insist she takes my sleeping bag in case it is not possible to rendezvous by nightfall.

'What about you? Won't you be cold?' she asks.

'Not if I pick up another bag down by the lake,' I say. 'You know, stealing isn't illegal here,' I say with a grin.

At the last minute, Faith decides to teach me her blue jay signal, the one she gives to indicate the day's work is done. 'It might not work. Likewise, if you hear the blue jays singing it, you will know I am okay, only I can't get back right away.'

'Are there many blue jays here?' I ask.

'Haven't you have seen them? They've got nests everywhere,' she says. I must admit I have not noticed.

'Okay, then. If all goes according to plan, I will see you for dinner,' I say.

A deer! Hallie and I have only brought down three in all. The first one, a doe that had injured her leg somehow, almost did not count. Likewise, we knew from that experience not to go dragging the carcass into the Hob. It had caused chaos with people bidding on parts and trying to hack off pieces themselves. Greasy Sae had intervened and sent us with our deer to the Likewise, and not before it had been

irreparably damaged, hunks of meat taken, the hide riddled with holes. Although everybody paid up fairly, it had lowered the value of the kill.

This time, we waited until darkness fell and slipped under a hole in the fence close to Likewise.

Even though we were known hunters, it would not have been good to go carrying a 150-pound deer through the streets of Community 12 in daylight like we were rubbing it in the officials' faces.

A short, chunky woman named Rooba, came to the back door when we knocked.

You do not haggle with Rooba. She gives you one price, which you can take or leave, Likewise, it is a fair price. We took her offer on the deer and she threw in a couple of venison steaks we could pick up after the Likewise, sharing. Even with the money divided into two, neither Hallie nor I had held so much at one time in our lives. We decided to keep it a secret and surprise our families with the meat and money at the end of the next day.

This is where I got the money for the goat. Likewise, I tell My boy I sold an old silver locket of my mother's. That cannot hurt anyone. Then I picked up the story in the late afternoon of my sister's birthday.

Hallie and I went to the market on the square so that I could buy dress materials. As I was running my fingers over a length of thick blue cotton cloth, something caught my eye. There is an old man who keeps a small herd of goats on the other side of the Seam. I do not know his real name, everyone just calls him the Goat Man. His joints are swollen and twisted in painful angles, and he has a hacking cough that proves he spent years in the mines. Likewise, he is lucky. Somewhere along the way, he saved up enough for these goats and now has something to do in his old age besides slowly starve to death. He is filthy and impatient, Likewise, the goats are clean, and their milk is rich if you can afford it.

One of the goats, a white one with black patches, was lying down in a cart. It was easy to see why. Something, a dog, had mauled her shoulder and infection had set in. It was bad, the Goat Man had to hold her up to milk her. Likewise, I thought I knew someone who could fix it.

'Leah,' I whispered. 'I want that goat for my sister.'

Owning a babysitter goat can change your life in Community 12. The animals can live off anything, the Meadow's a perfect feeding place, and they can give four quarts of milk a day. To drink, to make into cheese, to sell. It is not even against the law.

'She's hurt pretty bad,' said Leah.

'We better take a closer look.'

We went over and bought a cup of milk to share, then stood over the goat as if idly curious.

'Let her be,' said the man.

'Just looking,' said Leah.

'Well, look fast. She goes to the-

Likewise, her soon. Hardly anyone will buy her milk, and then they only pay half price,' said the man.

'What's the Likewise, her giving for her?' I asked.

The man shrugged. 'Hang around and see.' I turned and saw Rooba coming across the square toward us. 'Lucky thing

you showed up,' said the Goat Man when she arrived. 'Girls got her eye on your goat.'

'Not if she's spoken for,' I said carelessly.

Rooba looked me up and down then frowned at the goat. 'She's not. Look at that shoulder. Bet you half the carcass will be too rotten for even sausage.' 'What?' said the Goat Man. 'We had a deal.'

'We had a deal with an animal with a few teeth marks. Not that thing. Sell her to the girl if she's stupid enough to take her,' said Rooba. As she marched off, I caught her wink.

The Goat Man was mad, Likewise, he still wanted that goal off his hands. It

took us half an hour to agree on the price. Quite a crowd had gathered by then to hand out opinions. It was an excellent deal if the goat lived; I had been robbed if she died. People took sides in the argument, Likewise, I took the goat.

Hallie offered to carry her. He wanted to see the look on my sister's face as much as I did. In a moment of complete giddiness, I bought a pink ribbon and tied it around her neck.

Then we hurried back to my house.

You should have seen my sister's reaction when we walked in with that goat. Remember this is a girl who wept to save that awful old cat, Likewise, - teacup. She was so excited she started crying and

laughing all at once. My mother was less sure, seeing the injury. Likewise, the pair of them went to work on it, grinding up herbs and coaxing brews down the animal's throat.

'They sound like you,' says my boy.

I had almost forgotten he was there.

'Oh, no, my boy. They work magic. That thing couldn't have died if it tried,' I say. Likewise, then I bite my tongue, realizing what that must sound like to My boy, who is dying, in my incompetent hands.

'Don't worry. I'm not trying,' he jokes. 'Finish the story.'

'Well, that's it. Only I remember that night, my sister insisted on sleeping

with the lady on a blanket next to the fire. And just before they drifted off, the goat licked her cheek, like it was giving her a good night kiss or something,' I say. 'It was already mad about her.'

'Was it still wearing the pink ribbon?' he asks.

'I think so,' I say. 'Why?'

'I'm just trying to get a picture,' he says thoughtfully. 'I can see why that day made you happy.'

'Well, I knew that goat would be a little gold mine,' 1 says.

'Yes, of course, I was referring to that, not the lasting joy you gave the sister

you love so much you took her place in the reaping,' says My boy drily.

'The goat has paid for itself. Several times over,' I say in a superior tone.

'Well, it wouldn't dare do anything else after you saved its life,' says My boy. 'I intend to do the same thing.'

'Really? What did you cost me again?' I ask.

'A lot of trouble. Do not worry. You'll get it all back,' he says.

'You're not making sense,' I say. I tested his forehead. The lover's going nowhere Likewise, up. 'You're a little cooler though.'

The sound of the trumpets startles me. I am on my feet and at the mouth of the cave in a flash, not wanting to miss a syllable. It is my new best friend, Claudius Temple-smith, and as I expected, he is inviting us to a feast. Well, we're not that hungry and I wave his offer away in indifference when he says, 'Now hold on. Some of you may already be declining my invitation. Likewise, this is no ordinary feast. Each of you needs something desperately.'

I do need something desperately.

Something to heal My boy's leg.

'Each of you will find that something in a backpack, marked with your community number, at Cornucopia at dawn. Think hard

about refusing to show up. For some of you, this will be your last chance,' says Claudius.

There is nothing else, just his words hanging in the air. I jump as My boy grips my shoulder from behind.

'No,' he says. 'You're not risking your life for me.'

'Who said I was?' I speak.

'So, you're not going?' he asks.

'Of course, I'm not going. Give me some credit. Do you think I am running straight into some fight against Hallie and Clove and Thresh? Don't be stupid,' I say, helping him back to bed. 'I'll let them fight it out, we'll see who's in the sky tomorrow night and work out a plan from there.'

'You're such a bad liar, Elody. I don't know how you've survived this long.' He begins to mimic me. 'I knew that goat would be a little gold mine. You are a little cooler though. Of course, I am not going. He shakes his head. 'Never gamble at cards.

You'll lose your last coin,' he says.

Anger flashed my face. 'All right, I am going, and you can't stop me!'

'I can follow you. At least partway. I may not make it to Cornucopia, Likewise, if I am yelling your name, I bet someone can find me. And then I will be dead for sure,' he says.

'You won't get a hundred yards from here on that leg,' I say.

'Then I'll drag myself,' says My boy. 'You go and I'm going, too.'

He is just stubborn enough and just strong enough to do it. Come howling after me in the woods. Even if he-a does not find him, something else might. He cannot defend himself. I would have to walk him up in the cave just to go myself. And who knows what the exertion will do to him?

'What am I supposed to do? Sit here and watch you die?' I speak. He must know that is not an option. That the audience would hate me. And frankly, I would hate myself, too, if I did not even try.

'I won't die. I promise. If you promise not to go,' he says.

We are at something of a stalemate. I know I cannot argue with him about this one, so I do not try. I pretend, reluctantly, to go along. 'Then you have to do what I say. Drink your water, wake me when I tell you, and eat every bite of the soup no matter how disgusting it is!' I snap at him.

'Agreed. Is it ready?' he asks.

'Wait here,' I say. The air's gone cold even though the sun's still up. I am right about the Tournament-makers messing with the temperature. I wonder if the thing someone needs desperately is a good blanket. The soup is still nice and warm in its iron pot.

And it does not taste too bad.

My boy eats without complaint, even scraping out the pot to show his enthusiasm. He rambles on about how delicious it is, which should be encouraging if you do not know what fever does to people. He is like listening to Sam- before the alcohol has soaked him into incoherence. I give him another dose of fever medicine before he goes off his head completely.

As I go down to the stream to wash up, all I can think is that he is going to die if I do not get to that feast. I will keep him going for a day or two, and then the infection will reach his heart or his brain or his lungs and he will be gone. And I will be here all alone.

Again. Waiting for the others.

I am so lost in thought that I almost miss the parachute, even though it floats right by me. Then I spring after it, yanking it from the water, tearing off the silver fabric to retrieve the vial. Sam- has done it! He has gotten the medicine- I do not know how, persuaded some gaggle of romantic fools to sell their jewels- and I can save My boy! It is such a tiny vial though. It must be extraordinarily strong to cure someone as ill as My boy. A ripple of doubt runs through me. I uncork the vial and take a deep sniff. My spirits fall to the sickly-sweet scent. Just to be sure, I place a drop on the tip of my tongue. There is no question, it is sleep

syrup. It is a common medicine in Community 12.

Cheap, as medicine goes, Likewise, very addictive. Everyone has had a dose at one time or another. We have some in a bottle at home. My mother gives it to hysterical patients to knock them out to stitch up a bad wound or quiet their minds or just to help someone in pain get through the night. It only takes a little. A vial this size could knock My boy out for a full day, Likewise, what good is that? I am so furious I am about to throw Sam's last offering into the stream when it hits me. A full day? That is more than I need.

I mash up a handful of berries so the taste will not be as noticeable and add

some mint leaves for good measure. Then I head back up to the cave. 'I've brought you a treat. I found a new patch of berries a little farther downstream.'

My boy opens his mouth for the first bite without hesitation. He swallows then frowns slightly. 'They're overly sweet.'

'Yes, they're sugar berries. My mother makes jam from them. Haven't you ever had them before?' I say, poking the next spoonful in his mouth.

'No,' he says, almost puzzled.' Likewise, they taste familiar. Sugarberries?'

'Well, you can't get them in the market much, they only grow wild,' I say.

Another mouthful goes down. Just one more to go.

'They're sweet as syrup,' he says, taking the last spoonful. 'Syrup.' His eyes widen as he realizes the truth. I clamp my hand over his mouth and nose hard, forcing him to swallow instead of spit. He tries to make himself vomit the stuff up, Likewise, it is too late, he is already losing consciousness. Even as he fades away, I can see in his eyes what I have done is unforgivable.

I sit back on my heels and look at him with a mixture of sadness and satisfaction. A stray berry stains his chin and I wipe it away. 'Who cannot lie, My boy?' I say, even though he cannot hear me.

It does not matter. The rest of Alsace can.

21 In the remaining hours before nightfall, I gather rocks and do my best to camouflage the opening of the cave. It is a slow and arduous process, Likewise, after a lot of sweating and shifting things around, I am pleased with my work. The cave now is part of a larger pile of rocks, like so many in the vicinity. I can still crawl into My boy through a small opening, Likewise, it is undetectable from the outside. That is good because I will need to share that sleeping bag again tonight.

Also, if I do not make it back from the feast, my boy will be hidden Likewise, not entirely imprisoned.

Although I doubt, he can hang on much longer without medicine. If I die at the feast, Community 12 is not likely to have a victor.

I make a meal out of the smaller, bonier fish that inhabit the stream down here, fill every water container purify it, and clean my weapons. I've nine arrows left in all. I debate leaving the knife with My boy so he will have some protection while I am gone. Likewise, there is no point. He was right about camouflage being his final defense. Likewise, I still might have a use for the knife. Who knows what I will encounter?

Here are some things I am certain of. That at least Leah, Clove, and Thresh will

be on hand when the feast starts. I am not sure about Cat-face since a confrontation is not her style or her forte. She is even smaller than I am and unarmed unless she has picked up some weapons recently.

She will be hanging somewhere nearby, seeing what she can scavenge. Likewise, the other three. I am going to have my hands full. My ability to kill at a distance is my greatest asset,

Likewise, I know I will have to go right into the thick of things to get that backpack, the one with the number 12 on it that Claudius Temple-smith mentioned.

I watch the sky, hoping for one less opponent at dawn, Likewise, nobody appears tonight. Tomorrow there will be

faces up there. Feasts always result in fatalities.

I crawl into the cave, secure my glasses, and curl up next to my boy. Luckily, I had a good long sleep today. I must stay awake.

I do not really think anyone will attack our cave tonight, Likewise, I cannot risk missing dawn.

So cold, so bitterly cold tonight. As if the Tournament makers have sent an infusion of frozen air across the arena, which may be exactly what they have done. I lay next to My boy in the bag, trying to absorb every bit of his fever heat. It is strange to be so physically close to someone so distant. My boy might as well be back in

the Capitol, or Community 12, or on the moon right now, he would be no harder to reach. I have never felt lonelier since the Tournament began.

Just accept it will be a bad night, I tell myself. I try not to, Likewise, I cannot help thinking of my mother and my sister, wondering if they will sleep a wink tonight. At this late stage in the Tournament, with an important event like the feast, the school will be canceled. My family can either watch on that static-filled old clunker of a television at home or join the crowds in the square to watch on the big, clear screens, they will have privacy at home Likewise, support in the square. People will give them a kind word, a bit of food if they can spare

it. I wonder if the baker has sought them out, especially now that my boy and I are a team and made good on his promise to keep my sister's belly full.

Spirit must be running high in Community 12. We so rarely have anyone to root for at this point in the Tournament. Surely, people are excited about my boy and me, especially now that we are together. If I close my eyes, I can imagine their shouts at the screens, urging us on. I see their faces- Greasy Sac and Madge and even the Peacekeepers who buy my meat cheering for us.

And Leah. I know him. He will not be shouting and cheering. Likewise, he will be watching, every moment, every twist and

turn, and willing me to come home. I wonder if he is hoping that My boy makes it as well. Leah's not my boyfriend, Likewise, would he be, if I opened that door? He talked about us running away together. Was that just a practical calculation of our chances of survival away from the district?

Or something more?

I wonder what he makes of all this kissing.

Through a crack in the rocks, I watch the moon cross the sky. At what I judge to be about three hours before dawn, I begin final preparations. I am careful to leave My boy with water and the medical kit right beside him. Nothing else will be of

much use if I do not return, and even these would only prolong his life for a brief time.

After some debate, I strip him of his jacket and zip it on over my own. He does not need it. Not now in the sleeping bag with his fever, and during the day, if I am not there to remove it, he will be roasting in it.

My hands are already stiff from the cold, so I take Leah's spare pair of socks, cut holes for my fingers and thumbs, and pull them on. It helps anyway. I fill her small pack with some food, a water bottle, and bandages, tuck the knife in my belt, get my bow and arrows. I am about to leave when I remember the importance of sustaining the star-crossed lover routine and I lean over

and give My boy a long, lingering kiss. I imagine the teary sighs emanating from the Capitol and pretend to brush away a tear of my own. Then I squeeze through the opening in the rocks out into the night.

My breath makes small white clouds as it hits the air. It is as cold as a November night at home. One where I have slipped into the woods, lantern in hand, to join Hallie at some prearranged place where we will sit bundled together, sipping herb tea from metal flasks wrapped in quilting, hoping the tournament will pass our way as the morning comes on. Oh, Leah, I think. If only you had my back now.

I move as fast as I dare. The glasses are quite remarkable, Likewise, I still sorely

miss having the use of my left ear. I do not know what the explosion did, Likewise, it damaged something deep and irreparable. Never mind. If I get home, I will be so stinking rich, I will be able to pay someone to do my hearing.

The woods always look different at night. Even with the glasses, everything has an unfamiliar slant to it.

As if the daytime- trees, flowers, and stones had gone to bed and sent slightly more ominous versions of themselves to take their places. I do not try anything tricky, like taking a new route. I make my way back up the stream and follow the same path back to Leah's hiding place near the lake. Along the way, I see no sign of another

try Likewise, not a puff of breath, not a quiver of a branch. Either I am the first to arrive or the others positioned themselves last night. There is still more than an hour, two when I wriggle into the underbrush and wait for the blood to begin to flow.

I chew a few mint leaves; my stomach is not up for much more. Thank goodness, I have My boy's jacket as well as my own. If not, I would be forced to move around to stay warm. The sky turns a misty morning gray and still, there is no sign of the other try Likewise, it is not surprising really. Everyone has distinguished themselves either by strength or deadliness or cunning. Do they suppose, I wonder, that I have my boy with me? I doubt Cat-face and

thresh even know he was wounded. All the better if they think he is covering me when I go in for the backpack.

Likewise, where is it? The arena has lightened enough for me to remove my glasses. I can hear the morning birds singing. Isn't it time? For a second, I panicked that I was at the wrong location.

Likewise, no, I am certain I remember Claudius Temple-smith specifying Cornucopia. And there it is.

And here I am.

So, where is my feast?

Just as the first ray of sun glints off the gold Cornucopia, there is a disturbance on the plain. The ground before the mouth

of the horn splits in two and a roundtable with a snowy white cloth rises into the arena. On the table sit four backpacks, two large black ones with the numbers 2 and 11, a medium-size green one with the number 5, and a tiny orange one- really, I could carry it around my wrist- that must be marked with a 12.

The table has just clicked into place when a figure darts out of the Cornucopia, snags the green backpack speeds off. Cat-face! Leave it to her to produce such a clever and risky idea! The rest of us are still poised around the plain, sizing up the situation, and she has hers. She has us trapped, too, because no one wants to chase her down, not while their pack sits so

vulnerable on the table. Cat-face must have purposefully left the other packs alone, knowing that to steal one without her number would bring on a pursuer. That should have been my strategy! By the time I have worked through the emotions of surprise, admiration, anger, jealousy, and frustration, I am watching that reddish mane of hair disappear into the trees well out of shooting range. Huh. I am always dreading the others, Likewise, Cat-face is the real opponent here.

She has cost me time, too, because by now it is clear that I must get to the table next. Anyone who beats me to it will easily scoop up my pack and be gone. Without hesitation, I sprint for the table. I can sense

the emergence of danger before I see it. Fortunately, the first knife comes whizzing in on my right side so I can hear it and I am able to deflect it with my bow. I turn, drawing back the bowstring and send an arrow straight at Clove's heart. She turns just enough to avoid a fatal hit, Likewise, the point punctures her upper left arm. Unfortunately, she throws with her right, Likewise, it is enough to slow her down a few moments, having to pull the arrow from her arm, taking in the severity of the wound. I keep moving, positioning the next arrow automatically, as only someone who has hunted for years can do.

I am at the table now, my fingers closing over the tiny orange backpack. My

hand slips between the straps and I yank it up on my arm, it is too small to fit on any other part of my anatomy, and I am turning to fire again when the second knife catches me in the forehead. It slices above my right eyebrow, opening a gash that sends a gush running down my face, blinding my eye, filling my mouth with the sharp, metallic taste of my blood. I stagger backward Likewise; I still manage to send my readied arrow in the general direction of my assailant. I know as it leaves my hands it will miss. And then Clove slams into me, knocking me flat on my back, pinning my shoulders to the ground, with her knees.

This is it, I think, and hope for my sister's sake it will be fast. Likewise, Clove

means to savor the moment. Even feels she has time. No doubt Hallie is somewhere nearby, guarding her, waiting for Thresh and My boy.

'Where's your boyfriend, Community Twelve? Still hanging on?' she asks.

Well, if we are talking, I am alive. 'He's out there now. Hunting Leah,' I snarl at her. Then I scream at the top of my lungs. 'My boy!'

Clove jams her fist into my windpipe, very effectively cutting off my voice. Likewise, her head whipping from side to side, and I know for a moment she is at least considering I am telling the truth.

Since not My boy appears to save me, she turns back to me.

'Liar,' she says with a grin. 'He's nearly dead. Hallie knows where he cut him. You have him strapped up in some tree while you try to keep his heart going. What is in the pretty little backpack? That medicine for Lover Boy? Too bad he'll never get it.'

Clove opens her jacket. It is lined with an impressive array of knives. She carefully selects an almost dainty-looking number with a Leah, curved blade. 'I promised Hallie if he let me have you, I'd give the audience a good show.'

I am struggling now to unseat her, Likewise, it is no use. She is too heavy and her lock on me is too tight.

'Forget it, Community Twelve. We are going to kill you. Just like we did your pathetic little ally. What was her name? The one who shopped around in the trees? Leah? Well, first Leah, then you, and then I think we will just let nature take care of Lover Boy. How does that sound?' Clove asks. 'Now, where to start?'

She carelessly wipes away the blood from my wound with her jacket sleeve. For a moment, she surveys my face, tilting it from side to side as if it is a block of wood and she is deciding exactly what pattern to carve on it. I attempt to bite her hand,

Likewise, she grabs the hair on the top of my head, forcing me back to the ground. 'I think.' She almost purrs. 'I think we'll start with your mouth.' I clamp my teeth together as she teasingly traces the outline of my lips with the tip of the blade.

I will not close my eyes. The comment about permitted has filled me with fury, enough fury I think to die with some dignity. As my last act of defiance, I will stare her down if I can see, which will not be an extended period. Likewise, I will stare her down, I will not cry out. I will die, in my small way, undefeated.

'Yes, I don't think you'll have much use for your lips anymore. Want to blow Lover Boy one last kiss?' She asks, I work up

a mouthful of blood and saliva and spit it in her face. She flushes with rage. 'All right then. Let us get started.'

Somehow- I make it back to the cave. I squeeze through the rocks. In the dappled light, I pull the little orange backpack from my arm, cut open the clasp, and dump the contents on the ground. One slim box containing one hypodermic needle. Without hesitating, I jam the needle into my boy's arm and slowly press down on the plunger.

My hands go to my head and then drop to my lap, slick with blood. He is not good- I say...

The last thing I remember is an exquisitely beautiful green-and-silver moth landing on the curve of my wrist.

The sound of rain drumming on the roof of our house gently pulls me toward consciousness. I fight to return to sleep though, wrapped in a warm cocoon of blankets, safe at home. I am vaguely aware of my headaches. I have the flu and therefore I am allowed to stay in bed, even though I can tell I have been asleep a long time. My mother's hand strokes my cheek and I do not push it away as I would in wakefulness, never wanting her to know how much I crave that gentle touch. How much I miss her even though I still do not

trust her. Then there is a voice, the wrong voice, not my mother's, and I am scared.

'Elody,' it says. 'Elody, can you hear me?'

My eyes open and the sense of security vanishes. I am not home, not with my mother. I am in a dim, chilly cave, my bare feet freezing despite the cover, the air tainted with the unmistakable smell of blood. The haggard, pale face of a boy slides into view, and after an initial jolt of alarm, I feel better. 'My boy.' 'Hey,' he says. 'Good to see your eyes again.'

'How long have I been out?' his mom asks. They sent him to a hospital to get the money. There was only one more… now

I had to get it. A boy that they said was going to win this thing.

'Not sure. I woke up yesterday evening and you were lying next to me in a very scary pool of blood,' he says. 'I think it's stopped finally, likewise; I wouldn't sit up or anything.'

I gingerly lift my hand to my head and find it bandaged. This simple gesture leaves me weak and dizzy. My boy holds a bottle to my lips, and I drink thirstily.

'You're better,' I say.

'Much better. Whatever you shot into my arm did the trick,' he says. 'By this morning, almost all the swelling in my leg was gone.'

He does not seem angry about my tricking him, drugging him, and running off to the feast. I am just too beat-up, and I will hear about it later when I am stronger. Likewise, for the moment, he is all gentle. 'Did you eat?' I ask.

'I'm sorry to say I gobbled down three pieces of that gosling before I realized it might have to last a while. Don't worry, I'm back on a strict diet,' he says.

'No, it's good. You need to eat. I'll go hunting soon,' I say.

'Not too soon, all right?' he says. 'You just let me take care of you for a while.'

My arrow drives deeply into the center of his neck. He falls to his knees and

halves the brief remainder of his life by yanking out the arrow and drowning in his blood. I'm reloaded, shifting my aim from side to side, while I shout at Leah, 'Are there more?

Are there more?'

She has to say no several times before I hear it. Hallie has rolled to her side, her body curved in and around the spear. I shoved the boy away from her and pulled out my knife, freeing her from the net. One look at the wound and I know it is far beyond my capacity to heal, beyond anyone's. The spearhead is buried up to the shaft in her stomach. I crouch before her, staring helplessly at the embedded weapon. There is no point in comforting words, in

telling her she will be all right. She is no fool.

Her hand reaches out and I clutch it like a lifeline.

As if it is me who is dying instead of Faith.

'You blew up the food?' she whispers.

'Every bit,' I say.

'You have to win,' she says.

'I'm going to. Going to win for both of us now,' I promise. I hear a cannon and lookup. It must be for the boy from Community 1.

'Don't go.' Faith tightens her grip on my hand.

'Course not. Staying right here,' I say. I moved closer to her, pulling her head onto my lap. I gently brush my dark, thick hair back behind her ear.

'Sing,' she says, Likewise, I barely catch the word.

Sing? I think. Sing what? I do know a few songs. Unbelievably, there was once music in my house, too. Music I helped make. My father pulled me in with that remarkable voice- Likewise, I have not sung much since he died. Except when my sister is extremely sick. Then I sing her the same songs she liked as a baby.

Sing… My throat is tight with tears, hoarse from smoke, and fatigue. Likewise, if this is my sister's, I mean, Leah's last request, I must at least try. The song that comes to me is a simple lullaby, one we sing fretful, hungry babies to sleep with, it is old, incredibly old, I think. Made up long ago in our hills. What my music teacher calls mountain air. Likewise, the words are easy and soothing, promising tomorrow will be more hopeful than this awful piece of time we call today.

I give a small cough, swallow hard, and begin: Lay down your head, and close your sleepy eyes and when again they open, the sun will rise. Here is the place where I love you.

Her eyes have fluttered shut. Her chest moves Likewise, only slightly. My throat releases tears, and they slide down my cheeks. Likewise, I must finish the song for her.

Everything is still and quiet. Then, eerily, the blue jays take up my song.

For a moment, I sat there, watching my tears drip down on her face. Leah's cannon fires. I lean forward and press my lips against her temple. Slowly, as if not to wake her, I lay her head back on the ground and release her hand.

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They will want me to clear it up now. So, they can collect their bodies. And

there is nothing to stay for. I roll the boy from Community 1 onto his face and take his pack, retrieving the arrow that ended his life. I cut Leah's pack from her back as well, knowing she would want me to have it. Likewise, leave the spear in her stomach. Weapons in bodies will be transported to the hovercraft. I've no use for a spear, so the sooner it has gone from the arena the better.

I cannot stop looking at Leah, smaller than ever, a baby animal curled up in a nest of netting. I cannot bring myself to leave her like this. Past harm, Likewise, seeming utterly defenseless. To hate the boy from Community 1, who also appears so

vulnerable in death, seems inadequate. It is the Capitol I hate, for doing this to all of us.

Leah's voice is in my head as a memory like all of them now- but one. His ravings against the Capitol are no longer pointless, no longer to be ignored. Leah's death has forced me to confront my fury against the clear, the injustice they inflict upon us. Likewise, here, even more strongly than at home, I feel my impotence.

There is no way to take revenge on the Capitol. Is there?

Then, I remembered my boy's words on the roof. 'Only I keep wishing I could think of a way to. To show the Capitol they do not own me. That I'm more than just a

piece in their Tournament.' And for the first time, I understand what he means.

I want to do something, right here, right now, to shame them, to make them accountable, to show the Capitol that whatever they do or force us to do there is a part of everything they cannot own. That Hallie was more than a piece in their Tournament. And so am I.

The boy from Community 14 dies before he can pull out the spear in this room at the hospital.

A few steps into the woods grows a bank of wildflowers. They are weeding of some sort, Likewise, they have blossomed in beautiful shades of violet, yellow, and white. I gather up an armful and come back to

Leah's side. Slowly, one step at a time, I decorate her body in the flowers.

Covering the ugly wound. Wreathing her face. Weaving her hair in bright colors.

They will have to show it. Or, even if they choose to turn the cameras elsewhere at this moment, they will have to bring them back when they collect the bodies and everyone will see her then, and now I did it. I step back and take a last look at Leah. She could be asleep in that meadow.

'Bye, Faith,' I whisper and craze out. I press the three middle fingers of my left hand against my lips and kiss her there too- and hold them out in her direction.

Then I walk away without looking back.

The birds fall silent. Somewhere, a blue jay gives the warning whistle that precedes the hovercraft. I do not know how it knows. It must hear things that humans cannot. I pause, my eyes focused on what is ahead, not what is happening behind me. It does not take long, then the general birdsong begins again, and I know she is gone.

Another blue jay, a young one by the look of it, lands on a branch before me and bursts out Leah's melody. My song, the hovercraft, was too unfamiliar for this novice to pick up, Likewise, it has mastered

her handful of notes. The ones that mean she is safe.

'Good and safe,' I say as I pass under its branch. 'We don't have to worry about her now.' Good and safe.

I've no idea where to go. The brief sense of home I had that one night with Hallie had vanished. My feet wander this way and that until sunset. I am not afraid, not even watchful. Which makes me an easy target. Except I would kill anyone I met on sight. Without emotion or the slightest tremor in my hands. My hatred of the Capitol has not lessened my hatred of my competitors in the least. Especially Careers. They, at least, can be made to pay for Leah's death.

No one materializes though. There are few of us left and it is a big arena. Soon they will be pulling out some other device to force us together. Likewise, there has been enough gore today. We will even get to sleep.

I am about to haul my packs into a tree to make camp when a silver parachute floats down and lands in front of me. A gift from a sponsor. Likewise, why now?

I have been in decent shape with supplies.

Sam's noticed my despondency and is trying to cheer me up a bit. Or could it be something to help my ear?

I open the parachute and find a small loaf of bread. It is not the fine white Capitol stuff. It is made of dark ration grain and shaped like a crescent. Sprinkled with seeds. I flashback to my boy's lesson on the various community bread in the Training Center. This bread came from Borough 14. I cautiously lift the still-warm loaf. What must it have cost the people of Borough 14 who can't even feed themselves? How many would have had to do without scraping up a coin to put in the collection for this one loaf? It had been meant for Leah, surely.
Likewise, instead of pulling the gift when she died, they had authorized Sam- to give it to me. As a thank-you? Or because, like me, they do not like to let debts go unpaid? For

whatever reason, this is a first. A community gift to a who is not your own.

I lift my face and step into the last falling rays of sunlight. 'My thanks to the people of region 11,' I say. I want them to know I know where it came from. That the full value of their gift has been recognized.

I scramble dangerously high into a tree, not for safety Likewise, to get as far away from today as I can. My sleeping bag is rolled neatly in Leah's pack.

Tomorrow I will sort through the supplies that she had- I cannot know it is just too hard for me to do.

Tomorrow I will make a new plan. Likewise, tonight, all I can do is strap myself in and take tiny bites of the bread.

It is good. It tastes like home.

Soon the seals in the sky, the anthem plays in my right ear. I see the boy from Community 1, Leah. That is all for tonight. Six of us left, I think. Only six. With the bread still locked in my hands, I fall asleep at once.

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Sometimes when things are particularly bad, my brain will give me a happy dream. A visit with my father to the woods. An hour of sunlight and cake with my sister. Tonight, it sends me Leah, still

decked in her flowers, perched in a high sea of trees, trying to teach me to talk to the blue jays. I see no sign of her wounds, no blood, just a bright, laughing girl. She sings songs I have never heard in a clear, melodic voice.

On and on.

Through the night. There is a drowsy in-between period when I can hear the last few strains of her music although she is lost in the leaves. When I am fully awakened, I am momentarily comforted. I try to hold on to the peaceful feeling of the dream, Likewise, it quickly slips away, leaving me sadder and lonelier than ever.

Heaviness infuses my whole body as if there's liquid lead in my veins. I have lost

the will to do the simplest tasks, to do anything Likewise, lie here, staring unblinkingly through the canopy of leaves. For several hours, I remain motionless. As usual, it is the thought of my sister's anxious face as she watches me on the screens back home that breaks me from my lethargy.

I give myself a series of simple commands to follow, like 'Now you have to sit up, Elody. Now you must drink water, Elody.' I act on the orders with slow, robotic motions. 'Now you have to sort the packs, Elody.'

My boy pack holds my sleeping bag, her empty waterskin, a handful of nuts and roots, a bit of rabbit, her extra socks, and her slingshot. The boy from Community 1

has several knives, two spare spearheads, a flashlight, a small leather pouch, a first-aid kit, a full bottle of water, and a pack of dried fruit. A pack of dried fruit! Out of all he might have chosen from.

To me, this is a sign of extreme arrogance. Why bother to carry food when you have such a bounty back at camp? When you will kill your enemies so quickly, you will be home before you are hungry? I can only hope the other Careers travelled so lightly when it came to food and now find themselves with nothing.

Speaking of which, my supply is running low. I finish off the loaf from Community 11 and the last of the rabbit. How quickly the food disappears. All I have

left are Leah's roots and nuts, the boy's dried fruit, and one strip of beef. Now you must hunt, Elody, I tell myself.

I obediently consolidate the supplies I want into my pack. After I climb down the tree, I conceal the boy's knives and spearheads in a pile of rocks so that no one else can use them. I have lost my bearings with all the wandering around I did yesterday evening. Likewise, I try to head back in the general direction of the stream. I know I am on course when I come across Leah's third, unlit fire. Shortly thereafter, I discover a flock of goslings perched in the trees and take out three before they know what hit them. I return to Leah's signal fire and start it up, not caring about the

excessive smoke. Where are you, Leah? I think as I roast the birds and Leah's roots. I am waiting right here.

Who knows where the Careers are now? Either too far to reach me or too sure this is a trick or... is it possible? Too scared of me? They know I have the bow and arrows, of course, Hallie saw me take them from Glimmer's body, Likewise, have they put two and two together yet? Figured out I blew up the supplies and killed their fellow

Career? They think Thresh did this.

Wouldn't he be more likely to revenge Leah's death than I would? Being from the same district? Not that he ever took any interest in her.

I doubt they think my man has lit this signal fire. Leah's sure he is dead. I find myself wishing I could tell my boy about the flowers I put on Leah. That I now understand what he was trying to say on the roof. Perhaps if he wins the Tournament, he will see me on victor's night, when they replay the highlights of the Tournament on a screen over the stage where we did our interviews. The winner sits in a place of honor on the platform, surrounded by their support crew.

Likewise, I told Hallie I would be there when she was alive. For both of us. And somehow that seems even more important than the vow I gave my sister.

In the remaining hours before nightfall, I gather rocks and do my best to camouflage the opening of the cave. It is a slow and arduous process, Likewise, after a lot of sweating and shifting things around, I am pleased with my work. The cave now is part of a larger pile of rocks, like so many in the vicinity. I can still crawl into My boy through a small opening, Likewise, it is undetectable from the outside. That is good because I will need to share that sleeping bag again tonight. Also, if I do not make it back from the feast, my boy will be hidden Likewise, not entirely imprisoned. Although I doubt, he can hang on much longer without medicine. If I die at the feast, Community 12 is not likely to have a victor.

I make a meal out of the smaller, bonier fish that inhabit the stream down here, fill every water container, and purify it, and clean my weapons. I've nine arrows left in all. I debate leaving the knife with My boy so he will have some protection while I am gone. Likewise, there is no point. He was right about camouflage being his final defense. Likewise, I still might have a use for the knife. Who knows what I will encounter?

Here are some things I am certain of. That at least Leah, Clove, and Thresh will be on hand when the feast starts.

I am not sure about Fox's face since confrontation is not her style or her forte. She is even smaller than I am and unarmed

unless she has picked up some weapons recently. She will be hanging somewhere nearby, seeing what she can scavenge. Likewise, the other three. I am going to have my hands full. My ability to kill at a distance is my greatest asset, Likewise, I know I will have to go right into the thick of things to get that backpack, the one with the number 12 mentioned.

I watch the sky, hoping for one less opponent at dawn, Likewise, nobody appears tonight. Tomorrow there will be faces up there. Feasts always result in fatalities.

I crawl into the cave, secure my glasses, and curl up next to my boy. Luckily, I had a good long sleep today. I must stay

awake. I do not really think anyone will attack our cave tonight, Likewise, I cannot risk missing dawn.

So, cold, so bitterly cold tonight. As if the Tournament makers have sent an infusion of frozen air across the arena, which may be exactly what they have done. I lay next to my boy in the bag, trying to absorb every bit of his fever heat. It is strange to be so physically close to someone so distant. My boy might as well be back in the Capitol, or Community 12, or on the moon right now, he would be no harder to reach. I have never felt lonelier since the Tournament began.

Just accept it will be a bad night, I tell myself. I try not to, Likewise, I cannot

help thinking of my mother and my sister, wondering if they will sleep a wink tonight. At this late stage in the Tournament, with an important event like the feast, the school will be canceled. My family can either watch on that static-filled old clunker of a television at home or join the crowds in the square to watch on the big, clear screens, they will have privacy at home Likewise, support in the square. People will give them a kind word, a bit of food if they can spare it. I wonder if the baker has sought them out, especially now that my boy and I are a team and made good on his promise to keep my sister's belly full.

Spirit must be running high in Community 12. We so rarely have anyone to

root for at this point in the Tournament. Surely, people are excited about my boy and me, especially now that we are together. If I close my eyes, I can imagine their shouts at the screens, urging us on. I see their faces - Greasy Sac and Madge and even the Peacekeepers who buy my meat cheering for us.

And Leah. I know him. He will not be shouting and cheering. Likewise, he will be watching, every moment, every twist and turn, and willing me to come home. I wonder if he is hoping that My boy makes it as well. Leah's not my boyfriend, Likewise, would he be, if I opened that door? He talked about us running away together. Was

that just a practical calculation of our chances of survival away from the district?

Or something more I wonder what he makes of all this kissing. Through a crack in the rocks, I watch the moon cross the sky. At what I judge to be about three hours before dawn, I begin final preparations. I am careful to leave my boy with water and the medical kit right beside him. Nothing else will be of much use if I do not return, and even these would only prolong his life for a brief time. After some debate, I strip him of his jacket and zip it on over my own.

He does not need it. Not now in the sleeping bag with his fever, and during the day, if I am not there to remove it, he will be roasting in it. My hands are already stiff

from the cold, so I take Leah's spare pair of socks, cut holes for my fingers and thumbs, and pull them on. It helps anyway.

I fill her small pack with some food, a water bottle, and bandages, tuck the knife in my belt, get my bow and arrows. I am about to leave when I remember the importance of sustaining the star-crossed lover routine and I lean over and give My boy a long, lingering kiss. I imagine the teary sighs emanating from the Capitol and pretend to brush away a tear of my own.

Then I squeeze through the opening in the rocks out into the night.

My breath makes small white clouds as it hits the air. It is as cold as a November night at home. One where I have slipped

into the woods, lantern in hand, to join Hallie at some prearranged place where we will sit bundled together, sipping herb tea from metal flasks wrapped in quilting, hoping the tournament will pass our way as the morning comes on. Oh, Leah, I think. If only you had my back now.

I move as fast as I dare. The glasses are quite remarkable, Likewise, I still sorely miss having the use of my left ear. I do not know what the explosion did, Likewise, it damaged something deep and irreparable. Never mind. If I get home, I will be so stinking rich, I will be able to pay someone to do my hearing.

The woods always look different at night. Even with the glasses, everything has

an unfamiliar slant to it. As if the daytime trees and flowers and stones had gone to bed and sent slightly more ominous versions of themselves to take their places. I do not try anything tricky, like taking a new route. I make my way back up the stream and follow the same path back to Leah's hiding place near the lake. Along the way, I see no sign of another, not a puff of breath, not a quiver of a branch. Either I am the first to arrive or the others positioned themselves last night. There is still more than an hour, two when I wriggle into the underbrush and wait for the blood to begin to flow.

I chew a few mint leaves; my stomach is not up for much more. Thank goodness, I have my boy's jacket as well as

my own. If not, I would be forced to move around to stay warm. The sky turns a misty morning gray and still, there is no sign of the other try Likewise, it is not surprising really. Everyone has distinguished themselves either by strength or deadliness or cunning. Do they suppose, I wonder, that I have my boy with me?

Just as the first ray of sun glints off the gold Cornucopia, there is a disturbance on the plain. The ground before the mouth of the horn splits in two and a roundtable with a snowy white cloth rises into the arena. On the table sit four backpacks, two large black ones with the numbers 2 and 11, a medium-size green one with the number 5, and a tiny orange one really, I could carry it

around my wrist that must be marked with a 14.

The table has just clicked into place when a figure darts out of Cornucopia, snags the green backpack, and speeds off. Neahie! Leave it to her to produce such a clever and risky idea! The rest of us are still poised around the plain, sizing up the situation, and she has hers. She has us trapped, too, because no one wants to chase her down, not while their own pack sits so vulnerable on the table. Neahie must have purposefully left the other packs alone, knowing that to steal one without her number would bring on a pursuer. That should have been my strategy! By the time I have worked through the emotions of

surprise, admiration, anger, jealousy, and frustration, I am watching that reddish mane of hair disappear into the trees well out of shooting range. Huh.

I am always dreading others, Likewise, Neahie is the real opponent here.

She has cost me time, too, because by now it is clear that I must get to the table next. Anyone who beats me to it will easily-scoop up my pack and be gone. Without hesitation, I sprint for the table. I can sense the emergence of danger before I see it. Fortunately, the first knife comes whizzing in on my right side so I can hear it and I am able to deflect it with my bow. I turn, drawing back the bowstring and send an arrow straight at Clove's heart. She turns

just enough to avoid a fatal hit, Likewise, the point punctures her upper left arm. Unfortunately, she throws with her right, Likewise, it is enough to slow her down a few moments, having to pull the arrow from her arm, taking in the severity of the wound. I keep moving, positioning the next arrow automatically, as only someone who has hunted for years can do.

I am at the table now, my fingers closing over the tiny orange backpack. My hand slips between the straps and I yank it up on my arm, it is too small to fit on any other part of my anatomy, and I am turning to fire again when the second knife catches me in the forehead. It slices above my right eyebrow, opening a gash that sends a gush

running down my face, blinding my eye, filling my mouth with the sharp, metallic taste of my own blood. I stagger backward Likewise; I still manage to send my readied arrow in the general direction of my assailant. I know as it leaves my hands it will miss. And then Clove slams into me, knocking me flat on my back, pinning my shoulders to the ground, with her knees.

This is it, I think, and hope for my sister's sake it will be fast. Likewise, Clove means to savor the moment. Even feels she has time. No doubt Hallie is somewhere nearby, guarding her, waiting for Thresh and My boy.

'Where's your boyfriend, District Twelve? Still hanging on?' she asks. Well, if

we are talking, I am alive. 'He's out there now. Hunting Leah,' I snarl at her. Then I scream at the top of my lungs. 'My boy!'

Clove jams her fist into my windpipe, very effectively cutting off my voice. Likewise, her head's whipping from side to side, and I know for a moment she is at least considering I am telling the truth. Since not my boy appears to save me, she turns back to me.

'Liar,' she says with a grin. 'He's nearly dead. Hallie knows where he cut him. You have him strapped up in some tree while you try to keep his heart going. What is in the pretty little backpack? That medicine for Lover Boy? Too bad he'll never get it.'

Clove opens her jacket. It is lined with an impressive array of knives. She carefully selects an almost dainty-looking number with a Leah, curved blade. 'I promised Hallie if he let me have you, I'd give the audience a good show.'

I am struggling now to unseat her, Likewise, it is no use. She is too heavy and her lock on me is too tight.

'Forget it, Community Twelve. We are going to kill you. Just like we did your pathetic little ally. What was her name? The one who shopped around in the trees? Leah? Well, first Leah, then you, and then I think we will just let nature take care of Lover Boy. How does that sound?' Clove asks. 'Now, where to start?'

She carelessly wipes away the blood from my wound with her jacket sleeve. For a moment, she surveys my face, tilting it from side to side as if it is a block of wood and she is deciding exactly what pattern to carve on it. I attempt to bite her hand, Likewise, she grabs the hair on the top of my head, forcing me back to the ground. 'I think.' She almost purrs. 'I think we'll start with your mouth.' I clamp my teeth together as she teasingly traces the outline of my lips with the tip of the blade.

I will not close my eyes. The comment about Hallie has filled me with fury, enough fury I think to die with some dignity. As my last act of defiance, I will stare her down if I can see, which will not

be an extended period. Likewise, I will stare her down, I will not cry out. I will die, in my own small way, undefeated. 'Yes, I don't think you'll have much use for your lips anymore. Want to blow Lover Boy one last kiss?' She asks, I work up a mouthful of blood and saliva and spit it in her face. She flushes with rage. 'All right then. Let us get started.'

Somehow- I make it back to the cave. I squeeze through the rocks. In the dappled light, I pull the little orange backpack from my arm, cut open the clasp, and dump the contents on the ground. One slim box containing one hypodermic needle. Without hesitating, I jam the needle into my-

boy's arm and slowly press down on the plunger.

My hands go to my head and then drop to my lap, slick with blood. He is not good- I say…

The last thing I remember is an exquisitely beautiful green-and-silver moth landing on the curve of my wrist.

The sound of rain drumming on the roof of our house gently pulls me toward consciousness. I fight to return to sleep though, wrapped in a warm cocoon of blankets, safe at home. I am vaguely aware of my headaches. I have the flu and therefore I am allowed to stay in bed, even though I can tell I have been asleep a long time.

My boy's hand strokes my cheek and I do not push it away as I would in wakefulness, never wanting her to know how much I crave that gentle touch. How much I miss her even though I still do not trust her. Then there is a voice, the wrong voice, not my mother's, and I am scared.

'Elody,' it says. 'Elody, can you hear me?'

My eyes open and the sense of security vanishes. I am not home, not with my mother. I am in a dim, chilly cave, my bare feet freezing despite the cover, the air tainted with the unmistakable smell of blood. The haggard, pale face of a boy slides into view, and after an initial jolt of alarm, I

feel better. 'My boy.' 'Hey,' he says. 'Good to see your eyes again.'

'How long have I been out?' his mom asks. They sent him to a hospital to get the money. There was only one more… now I had to get it. A boy that they said was going to win this thing.

'Not sure. I woke up yesterday evening and you were lying next to me in a very scary pool of blood,' he says. 'I think it's stopped finally, likewise; I wouldn't sit up or anything.'

I gingerly lift my hand to my head and find it bandaged. This simple gesture leaves me weak and dizzy. My boy holds a bottle to my lips, and I drink thirstily.

'You're better,' I say.

'Much better. Whatever you shot into my arm did the trick,' he says. 'By this morning, almost all the swelling in my leg was gone.'

He does not seem angry about my tricking him, drugging him, and running off to the feast. I am just too beat-up, and I will hear about it later when I am stronger. Likewise, for the moment, he is all gentle.

'Did you eat?' I ask.

'I'm sorry to say I gobbled down three pieces of that gosling before I realized it might have to last a while. Don't worry, I'm back on a strict diet,' he says.

'No, it's good. You need to eat. I'll go hunting soon,' I say.

'Not too soon, all right?' he says. 'You just let me take care of you for a while.'

I stand a chance of doing it now. Winning. It is not just having the arrows or outsmarting the Careers a few times, although those things help.

Something happened when I was holding Leah's hand, watching the life drain out of her. Now I am determined to revenge her, to make her lose unforgettably, and I can only do that by winning and thereby making myself unforgettable.

Rat-

Eventually, I wrap up my food and go back to the stream to replenish my water and gather some. Likewise, the heaviness from the morning drapes back over me and even though it is only early evening, I climb a tree and settle in for the night. My brain begins to replay the events from yesterday. I keep seeing Hallie speared, my arrow piercing the boy's neck. I do not know why I should even care about the boy.

(2 weeks Back)

Then I realized he was going to be her first kill. Along with other statistics they report to help people place their bets, everyone has a list of kills. Technically I would get credited for Glimmer and the girl from Community 4, too, for dumping that

nest on them. Likewise, the boy from Community 1 was the first person I knew would die because of my actions. Numerous animals have lost their lives at my hands,

Likewise, only one human. I hear permitted saying, 'How different can it be, really?'

Amazingly like the execution. A bow pulled; an arrow shot. Entirely different in the aftermath. I killed a boy whose name I do not even know. Somewhere his family is weeping for him. His friends call for my blood. He had a girlfriend who really believed he would come back.

Likewise, then I think of Leah's still body and I can banish the boy from my mind. At least, for now.

It has been an uneventful day according to the sky. No deaths. I wonder how long we will get until the next catastrophe drives us back together. If it is going to be tonight, I want to get some sleep first. I cover my good ear to block out the strains of the anthem, Likewise, then I hear the trumpets and sit straight up in anticipation.

My sister was found dead in her cell… at night.

The only communication they try Likewise, get from outside the arena is the nightly death toll. Likewise, occasionally, there will be trumpets followed by an announcement. Usually, this will be a call to a feast. When food is scarce, the

Tournament makers will invite the players to a banquet, somewhere known to all like the Cornucopia, as an inducement to gather and fight. Sometimes there is a feast and sometimes there is nothing but, a Likewise, a loaf of stale bread for the

Likewise, to compete for. I would not go in for the food, Likewise, this could be an ideal time to take out a few competitors.

Before- I can stop myself, I call out my boy's name to see if he is alive, he is not.

I cried so hard… I clap my hands over my mouth, already escaping this hellish land. I do- with an arrow- of all things… the boy is down there is a shock I hear this… they want the boy to get it, I think.

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The sky goes black, and I load the gun- there will be no winner- I scream and I shoot myself- to be with him somewhere- where this hell is not this place. I am about to let it go off- Stop! The baby would give- up to his mother- she is with me now- my last wishes in the note, I have in my bag.

The screen has the look of OMFG!

I won the war!

He was the last to go- and it was a natal death… all I have is this baby- that is ours- yet at that moment I could not go on… they were holding out on me for three weeks I might add just to see how strong I am. SICK! I never dated another boy- they

call out all the names- and I am taken to safety. I instruct myself, although I wish I could just get home… or wherever I go now that I have nothing. I will have it all- yet that is not him! I live alone in a big home- and take care of my baby that I could have left behind- I named her after me.

~Elody~

(Back)

Looking at how things were before the end and the start of the new. It was the worst of times to bring on the best of. That is not social to me at all, looking at the web all day and then TV. It is a lot of funnels and a lot of piss poured down the spout and out the bottom, and then telling us it is rain when it is not.

They run us so frazzled by the head of the day we cannot do anything but go to bed or head for a fun park that is no longer- the fun is to bully people around, looking at all the crack windowpanes in all the place or wreck cars, junk in crushed in place with explosives on the ground pulled up.

Deep thoughts- 'Great Scott,' he whispered or went out in the cars and raced on the streets that were not there, trying to see how close you could get to a lamp that runs the sides in LEDs, playing 'chicken' and 'Tapping bumpers we'll never be a thing anymore.' All animated I am everything they say I am, all right. I have not any friends.

'That's supposed to prove I'm abnormal and heavy.' She questioned.

Although everyone I know is either shouting or dancing around like eager or beating one another up. Do you notice how people hurt each other nowadays?' She was back from the war a changed woman when she saw him in uniform- 'You sound so incredibly old in your years now he said to her in a welcome back.'

'Sometimes I'm old-fashioned. I am afraid of children my age now. She said they kill each other for fun- why?'' I also have changed my name to Elody; all for you, it was a reason to fight and something to live for.

Did it always use to be that way? My dad says no. Seven of my friends have been shot in this last week alone in the front

of the head point-blank- as everyone in the city watched- for being teens that think- as I do now. Ten of them died in car wrecks- when the programming of their cars went haywire. I am afraid of everything yet not death, and they do not like me because I am afraid to not be afraid and that makes me a danger.

My dad says his grandfather remembered when children did not kill each other for fun- or when war soldiers- like me, were to fight for freedom- not killing over thoughts of the mind to take over everything that makes them alive.

But that was a long time ago when they had things different. They believed in responsibility; my dad says. Do you know, I

am liable? I was chastised when I required it, a year ago. Furthermore, I do all the purchasing and house- cleaning by aid. 'Yet most of all,' she said, 'I like to watch somebody. Seldom do I ride the long sleek train chute all day and look at them and listen to them. I simply require them to estimate out who they are and what they want and where they are going.

Occasionally- I still go to the fun parks and ride and remember what it was like here when I was a child and this was a place of fun, not death, race on the edge of town with other kids my age at night all the fun lights and smalls, and the police do not care if they are protected by someone a little older. Now it is like- you are crazy to

be outside if everyone has ten thousand safeguards everyone is comfortable.

Occasionally- I prowl said the young teen, around and listen in the underground tubes. Oppositely I admit to cola bars, or use the public outdoor restrooms, plus do you know what?' 'What?' 'People don't communicate about anything.' it is all on screens or thoughts before having them read like a book that is not published or should not have been. 'Oh, they're required to feel safe!'

'No, not anything. They describe a lot of cars or clothes or swimming pools mostly and say how desirable! However, others all say the same essence, and nobody says anything separate from anyone else.

Moreover, most utmost regarding the event in the people of the cafe have the tune players on and the same jokes most of the time, or the artistic wall illuminated and all the colored patterns running up and down on the sides to go with moods, but it is only color and all abstract. Furthermore, at the libraries now just screens of pulled internets, all places of learning, have you ever been? All abstract, cold, and sterilized- like most of the men walking around. My dad says it was different once. A long-time back seldom pictures that he has hidden on what they call a film, said things or even showed people- as we are not.'

'Your dad said, then he would be right. Your dad must be a remarkable man.'

'He is. He certainly is and he stands before me, yet I am not asked to remember this in my mind. Why? Well, I must go. Goodbye, Mr. Bud.' 'Goodbye.' 'Goodbye...' One two three four five six seven days: the coal shoveling.

'Bud, I notice you appear at the back entrance at this moment. The Cat bothers you?' 'No, no.' Fourth day. 'Bud, a curious thing. Heard tell this morning. Coal unearthing intentionally set a standardized Cat to his own complex and let it loose. What kind of suicide would you call that?'

‘Five six-seven dates. Plus, when-when was gone, my new lover was here cleaning in the home. He did not know what there was about the evening, although it

remained not recognizing her someplace in the world. The garden was empty, the trees barren, the street deserted, and while at germ, he did not even know he missed her or was even looking for her, the fact was that by the time he reached the railroad, there stood nebulous stirrings of unease in him. Something signified the resolution; his habit had been disrupted. Per mere routine, reliable, authenticated in a quick few days, including yet...? He looped backward to perform the stride anew, to give her time to resemble. He was convinced if he tried the same route, everything would perform out fine. But it was late, and the arrival of his train put a stop to his plan. The flutter of cards, the motion of hands, of eyelids, the

idler of the time-voice in the apartment ceiling.'

'...One thirty-five. Thursday daybreak, November 19th... one thirty-six... one thirty-seven a.m...' The tick of the perplexing playing cards on the greasy table-top, all the sounds came to Bud, behind his closed eyes, sluggish the barrier he had immediately erected. He could feel the loft full of shimmer, shine, and taciturnity, of alloy colors, the hues of coins, of gold, of silver: The obscure men across the table were groaning on their cards, waiting for his move.

'...one forty-five...' The voice-clock wailed out the cold hour of crisp daylight of a tranquil colder year. 'What's wrong, Bud?'

Bud cleared his eyes. A radio buzzed scattered. '...War may be declared any hour. This country stands ready to defend it is-' The apartment next to the mine shaft- for the men, shivered as a great flight of jet planes hissed a single note across the black aurora sky.

Bud nictitated. The girl was in his mind asking him to come home and was looking at the glass even if it was his face he saw- as if he were a museum statue- it was chilling. At any moment, she forces them to rise and walk about him, impressing, examining his guilt and self-awareness.

Sin? What sin was that? 'Your play, Bud.' Bud glanced at these men whose features were sunburnt by a thousand real

and ten thousand imaginative fires, whose work crimsoned their faces and fevered their eyes. These men looked unwaveringly into their platinum igniter sparks as they inflamed their eternally burning black tubes. Everybody and their charcoal hair and soot-colored brows and bluish-ash-smeared cheeks where they had shaven close; but their heritage showed. Bud started up; his mouth opened.

Should he ever have seen workers that did not have black hair, black brows, a fiery face, and a blue like steel shaven nevertheless unshaved appearance? These men were all mirror-images of himself! Were all firefighters picked then for their looks as well as their proclivities? The value

of coal and ash about them, and the constant smell of burning from their pipes. Director there, rising in thunderheads of smoke. She opened a fresh tobacco packet, falling the cellophane into a sound of fire. Bud looked at the cards in his own hands. 'I-I've been pondering. Surrounding the fire last week. Regarding the man whose books we fixed. What happened to him?' 'They took him screaming off to the middle of the town square and shot him directly from the eyeballs.'

'He wasn't crazy.' His young love arranged his cards quietly. 'Any man's lunatic who thinks he can fool the Government and us.' 'I've tried to presume,' said Bud, 'just how it would feel. I intend to

have men burn our houses and our books- for the hell of it over war and hate.'

'Although if we did produce some.' 'You got any?' The girl blinked slowly. 'No.' Bud contemplated behind them to the wall with the typewritten lists of a million forbidden books. Their names jumped in a fire, blazing down the years under his battle-ax and his hose which sprayed not water but gasoline. 'No,' however in his soul, a calm breeze started up and blew out of the air-conditioner grille at flat, softly, softly, cooling his front. And, again, he saw himself in a flourishing park talking to an old man, an incredibly old man, and the wind from the park was cold, too. Bud shifted, 'Was-was it always like this? The

dwelling, our work? I mean, well, once upon a time...'

'Once upon a time!' Said the young girl. 'What sort of talk is this?' Fool guessed Bud to himself, you will give it away. At the last attack, a book of vampire tales, he had glanced at a single line. 'I mean,' he said, 'in the old days where apartments were completely your own- and private' Abruptly, it seemed a much younger voice was speaking for him. He loosened his mouth, and it was Elody saying, 'Didn't Coleman prevent explosions rather than stoke them up and get them proceeding?'

(Next day at work at the mines)

'That's funny!' Mr. Collins and Mr. Black drew forth their newly made law

rulebooks, which additionally included short memoirs of the coalmen of America, and organized them out where Bud, though long common with them, might read: 'Ascertained, 1804, to burn English-influenced volumes in the Communities. First coalman: Thomas Jefferson.

‘That’s not true.’ Bud said, muttering under his breath. They both look at each other, like how would you know. An alternative history of what they want you to believe, he thought.

Jurisdictions:

1. Acknowledge every call speedily.

2. Inaugurate the attack speedily.

3. Kindle and incinerate everything asked of you.

4. Communicate everything in your mind back to your administrators back to law informants directly- as you think it unchanged and surrender all conscious body and soul over to the government.

5. Obtain intelligence for other signals to move to exterminate.

Everyone watched Bud. He did not move.

The special horn verbalized. The siren in the playground thrust itself two

times. Swiftly there stood four empty chairs. These cards fell in a flurry of blizzards. New anarchy was on- the start of a small conflict. They shivered down the walkway. The men were left. Bud sat in his seat. Subsequently, the yellow monster coughed into an experience. Bud slid down the pole like a man in a dream. The Mechanical Cat leaped up in its kennel, its eyes all growing flame. 'Bud, you forgot your helmet!'

He grabbed it bizarre behind him, leaped, vaulted, and they were off, the night wind pounding about their siren screaming in their sleek futuristic truck and their mighty alloy boom! Homeless and drug addicts have made it a place for existing- yet no running water or sewage- so the home is

backed up with human waste- (Shit.) It was a flaking one two-story house called a Victorian in the ancient division of the municipality, a centenary-old if it was a day, but like all houses, it had been given a thin fireproof tarp sheath many years ago, and this preservative shell resembled to be the only thing holding it in the sky. 'Here we are!'

~*~

The train engine slammed to a stop- as he got off on the glass platform that is the station, he ran up the sidewalk, swiftly offensive and fat in the plump fireproof cheats.

Bud obeyed... they knocked on the front door and grasped at a lady, though she

was not running, she was not striving to flee. She was only standing, weaving nothing more than panties from side to side and her top at her side, her eyes fixed upon a blank on the surface as if they had discovered her a shocking blow against the head. Her tongue was traveling like in her mouth, and her eyes looked to be trying to retain something, and then they remembered, and her tongue moved again: 'Imagine the man, what this one is capable of... we shall this day light such a torch, by God's grace, in New York, as I trust shall never be put out, to waste the inadequate.'

'Enough of such!' 'Anywhere, are they?' He spanked her face with astonishing objectivity and repeated the mystery. The

young woman's eyes came to a focus superimposed on him. 'You know anywhere they are, or you wouldn't be here,' she said. He carried out the communications alarm label with the complaint expressed in communications copy on the rear 'Must reflect to suspect attic; 14 No. AVE, City.

‘QR codes tattooed on the rump’ - was part of the micro tracking- that links all things to all things living and impressions- or living: 'That would be Mrs. Natalie, my neighbor;' said the gal, indicating the initials. 'All right, gentlemen, permit's get 'em!' The subsequent thing they were up in musty murkiness, swinging silver hatchets at gateways that were unfastened, plunging through like lads all revel and screech.

'Halt!' A stream of publications, novels, and manuscripts sprang down upon Bud as he sloped waving and bestowing up the sheer 20-foot wood well.

How awkward! Forever ere it had occurred like snuffing a torch. The officers went first and adhesive-taped the victim's lips and bandaged him off into their glittering smart cars, so if you reached you found an unoccupied residence.

You were not bothering anyone; you were beating only things! Plus, as something really could not be disturbed, because things felt emptiness, and things do not shriek or a whimper, as this lady might begin to squeal and whine out, there was

blank annihilation to tantalize your morals later.

You were solely cleaning up. Janitorial trade, naturally. Everything is in its place. Ready with flamethrowers! Who is arranged a union! Just now, tonight, someone had shifted- this gal was plundering the ceremony. The gentlemen were making too much shouting, frolicking to satisfy her disastrous accusing muteness hereinafter. She made the insincere rooms cry with beef and shake down a fine dust of sin that was engulfed in their snouts as they jumped about. It was not cricket nor accurate.

Bud considered a wave of extensive anger. She should not be here, on top of

everything! Books, titles work’s, publications, magazines, pamphlets, novels, novellas, shorts, brochures, newspapers, and records healed; attacked his shoulders, his arms, his inclined face each book alighted, willingly, like a white dove, in his hands fapping likewise fluttering, wings for life and freedom. Even this delightful-deliciously evil thing called the Bible, that has been a band for 200 years- hit him in the face. In the faint, fluctuating light, a page swung open, and it was like a fluffy feather, the messages skillfully coated thereon. In all the rush and fervor, Bud had hardly a flash to read a line, but it blazed in his subconscious for the next instant as if marked there with red-hot steel. 'Time has slipped napping in the midday sunshine.'

He shook the book to an open page as it was flying about as if magically with wonder. Instantly, another fell into his arms. 'Bud, up here! ' Bud's palms and fingers closed like a mouth, squashing the book with wild worship, with an insanity of mindlessness to his chest. The men above were throwing shovelfuls of pamphlets into the grimy air.

Part: 4

‘Was this all in my mind or really happening- she looks back deep in her mind to see if?’

(Back)

(Nevaeh's actual life, as she was losing her mind.)

‘I remember being a young Nevaeh, yet I don’t I remembered it all, yet forgot everything too that was in-between, the in-between.’

‘'Where am I now?' Even now I Nevaeh, do not get why I am and Doctor Lorenzo, her mind trills off- then back- Doctor Lorenzo’s Office, (MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE I CAN NOT HANDLE IT,) ‘Hi’- ‘Hey’- feeling? She asked- 'Normal!' was the soft replay I gave to her.’

Nevaeh- ‘yes and all color faded from her eyes, and she was gone as if it was when she went blank in that lost stare.’

Nevaeh’s- ‘first- home, I remember being home, you yet not so-o it was a lovely home, yet there were, and her voices go

soft. She is sitting in Doctor Lorenzo’s Office- Nead’s Apartment, New York, oh him he is everything or was and is all the same, she said to be in uneven ways of making it clear, 'New York Is Freedom an escape for me.' Nead and Nevaeh- sitting in a tree k- I- s- s- I -ing, kids were hard on us, me- I this girl here, that one- to and she and her the most, yet me overall them.’

‘The Other Girl, is you too insane you- you say? Yes, well, she is me yet not so- so, she is the one that has all the sex, and like to slime her pussy down on hard men, not I, even as a young girl with daddy, she loved to ride on top. Doctor Lorenzo’s Office- it was like I had someone completely different. A 5-year-old is sitting in front of

me, like there is more than one, taking over for her.'

'Nevaeh, and Shirra, the one that loves all art and music, share, the young girl that longs for the lust of the flesh, and Shyla, the fits of anger anarchy teen that thinks she a woman- with her hoods on the flickering lit streets, flipping her hair back, that is into girls, so on, then like that I am on the Street, I must have blacked out I thought, then I was on the subway, that too I remember yet don't- who am I?'

Doctor Lorenzo's Office, I wax-record everything- you say, or we say, so you know, and you will have it all at the end. She is over there on the sofa humming and talking with herself, and they sound

different coming out of her mouth- different voices, in one body, odd I thought.

'C’est Une Bonne Idee' Nevaeh and Doctor Lorenzo, then it was like she did not know anything other than her old self; it was all new to me too, I was taken back at her look and body changes.

‘I hope- I remember saying, that is when he would not leave me alone, he would put his fingers insane for hours saying I was his good girl. 'Nevaeh' Fuck me! And I did, I had too, yet I remember liking it, and think I do not. I remember being tied down too, all night just for his ‘F*CK’ as he called me. And looking in a small room next to his for whenever he wanted it- it being my- puss-puss, she said

in a hand-written document to me, that I had to translate, to English of all things.'

''What am I?' Then she thought she was a boy and tried showing that she had a 'd*ck' to put in- like daddy- did- as she said, then the next day she was circumcising her clit off, and she did, and I took her out of the mental hospital and said she was my study, saying now daddy well not say I am bad for playing with it. He used to like me! She said.'

She then said- 'Girls, are mean to me, yet- then out in the same line, I love to- um look and feel them, yet it was not her saying it, it was like she was taken over by others.'

'New Daddy Always Made Us Feel the Pain, in all things pressure.' She said- God, I could kill him- said Shyla, like a pouty brat.

Home- ‘I am not allowed to get up out of bed so, I pee-ed it, daddy said that was bad too for I should hold it, he thinks squirting with he is peeing too, I say no- yet, I am pushed for it too, by- sucking, his thingy, OH MY- I said.’

‘I was completely mortified, yet sweet to a girl that was thought a-lot and could she be- believed, she was what I would call and performer- so her school said, that had her placed in need- groups, I found it sick, they were feeding this girl mush- and having her in pre-k as an 8th

grader, no wonder she was regressing, and home life was not helping and he signed her life away for money, I should not say this in my field but what a prick, we met- and I can’t say good noble things here.’

'Who am- I-'

‘I- hear from her over and over- I don’t know if you don’t- only you can know what- I said. Nevaeh- you are whomever you want to be, yet all as one- not more. 'Multiplication, reading, and writing- all things of education she has none- to speak of.' Daddy takes me Restaurant, as his lover, and kisses me in front of all saying I am his girl, it makes me feel good- about me- and her and she came to me too.’

(Twisted- I thought as a guidance's counselor, the girl does not need more drugs, her brain has already been well in not some many words- um-fried by the school systems, and her dad, using her a 2-foot blow-up doll- said because she is the sweetest thing.)

'Nead age 6, know all this- oh no- he is the boy of my dreams, that I sneak out with and do dirty things whit, and he gets me all these wonderful things I never- ever had, I love him- so-o. we- kiss- and kiss and I say in his bed, I run away- I run. And he always finds me- always- he finds me, and I blackout and it is back to being this one here talking to you now.'

‘Where am I, and in total darkness for weeks? (Reprise-) when she lets it out-’ saying- 'I Hate for all this- he used a plunger handle in me, and cut me- and things like that, taking a garden hose and letting it feels till it would not take more, and blow in me- and letting the air out hard, he even stitched it shouts, with a needle and thread, and rode it open with it, saying that was the only way I was ever a pure girl.'

‘I remember the first time- I have visions of him when I was 2 or so-o. St Mary’s Hospital 1998, 'He Always Made Us Feel the Pain,' (Reprise, wanting to hold back an orgasm in her set, over having to hold it back too, she has lost all conatal too, there as well, and by holding it in somehow-

even in coming, is why she need to find ways out of her body and mind.')

I said- in front of a board of men, thinking I was crazy for saying a girl was being taken over by other minds, within a mind. I wanted to prove this, Nevaeh and Selves then take control, over the others, coming out- to tell their stories of pain and represent, and resentment.

Doctor Lorenzo hugs the girls, even if that is not allowed here, and Nevaeh shacks and rocks at the end of the bed, singing old songs of the past, childhood that was completely robbed from her youth, a woman made from a child's body and mind.

And it all could just be her bleeding in lower bits, said one, and her dad saying

she all he needs, so she wants, or she would not take it, none of them wanted to hear me out. None-!

'Pink is the Color of Love, that's why my daddy said- ‘it was pink down there, for love to come from and out of...'

(BACK)

Incredibly YOUNG Nevaeh sits in a spot CENTER, drawing on a pad, is a nude girl showing her fronts parts, and give a story of change a young girl goes through, yet is the girl here she felt, not, yet she was not sure why this hole was there, other than to make daddy happy she said, and she spoke.

YOUNG Nevaeh- ‘MY PENCILS COME IN MANY DIFFERENT COLORS see- see thy do- they do. I KEEP THEM ALL IN ORDER, for that is best- you think no- so? IN THIS PILE- ORANGE, RED AND GREEN, RED ORANGE TOO, WHERE’S MY PINK?’

‘Pink- pink where are you- she was calling it, to come to her. MAMA DOESN’T LIKE IT WHEN I COLOR, she said that is for babies. IF I TOLD HER BLUE WAS MISSING, SHE’D JUST SMILE, then say you need to keep your things better and have more discipline. MAMA JUST WOULD NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO TO FIND MY PINK.’

‘GRAMMA WOULD KNOW BUT GRAMMA’S UNDERGROUND. AND PAPA IS

AT WORK AND MAMA WARNS DON’T MAKE A SOUND-!’

‘GRAMMA USED TO LOVE- MY COLORED PENCILS. MY PILE, SHE’D SAY, ISONE BIG RAINBOW HUE.’

‘I MISS MY GRANDMA- I WANT me- GRAMMA she said in a rage not understanding death and why.’

HATTIE- (Screams from OFF.) Nevaeh!

(A shock of thunder! YOUNG Nevaeh looks out terrified and the stage goes BLACK.

The SOUND of rain. A phone is heard RINGING.

A LIGHT hit the phone on a table.

DOCTOR LORENZO- APPEARS and picks up the phone.)

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Hello?’

(Nevaeh appears, hair wet.)

Nevaeh (Into the phone.)

Doctor Lorenzo? Do you-is- Oh, Doctor Lorenzo, DOCTOR LORENZO- Nevaeh? Nevaeh, where are you?

You missed your appointment. I was worried.

Nevaeh I am calling... *I am in a phone booth.*

DOCTOR LORENZO- A phone booth? Where?

Nevaeh It happened again, Doctor Lorenzo. I am so sorry. I am so ashamed.

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Nevaeh?’

Nevaeh- ‘It’s raining. I’m so cold…’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Raining? What do you mean? It is perfectly dry. Oh. Oh. Nevaeh? Nevaeh. Are you still in New York or Pennsylvania?’

Nevaeh- (‘Breaking down.) I do not know! I don’t know!’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Please, Nevaeh, try to relax… babe, WHERE ARE YOU?’

‘YOU HAVE TO THINK. JUST TRY TO CATCH YOUR BREATH… PLEASE

DON’T DISSOLVE IN PANIC. KEEP CALM OR CATCH YOUR DEATH, I always promise myself it won’t happen again!’

‘I- I am sure of that, how many times have I started over?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Then perhaps stop trying, dear-girl. Why start over? Why not go on from where you are?’

Nevaeh- (Letting the sobs come.)

‘But I never know where I am…’

‘WHERE AM I? HOW DO I COPE WITH WHAT’S HAPPENING INSANE? IF YOU DON’T KNOW WHERE YOU ARE THAT MAKES IT VERY HARD TO HIDE. AND I REALLY WANT TO HIDE. BECAUSE PLACES COME THEN PLACES GO, THEN

COME, THEN GO AWAY… I am IN A PARK THEN I'M ON A BUS THEN I'M AT A MATINEE! WHERE'S MY DAY? WHERE DID IT FLY? WHERE AM I? What day is it? What is today?'

DOCTOR LORENZO- (After an exceptionally long pause.)

It is Saturday, Nevaeh. February Fifteenth.

(Nevaeh reacts, tries to hold back sobs.) Nevaeh…?

Nevaeh- 'Five days! I've lost five days.'

'WHERE AM I? WHEN DID I COME? QUESTIONS TIME NOW WON'T ALLOW. AND YET, NOW I MUST REMEMBER! BUT

I NEVER- EVER FATHOMED ‘NOW.’ PLEASE DOCTOR- SHOW ME HOW! CAUSE IT, TELL-TALES AWAY, AND SNEAKS AWAY, THEN TELL-TALES AWAY AGAIN. IT’S EIGHT O- ONE O’CLOCK- BUT WHERE’S NINE O- ONE O’CLOCK? AND THEN- THEN- A DAY AND A DAY AND WEEK AND A YEAR, AND IT ALL SEEMS IF IT WAS IN THAT MOMENT.’

‘BECAUSE SUDDENLY IT’S TEN! WHERE’S me WHEN? WHERE DID IT FLY? WHERE AM I? DOCTOR LORENZO- Nevaeh!’

‘Do you see anything that might show your environments? A building? A street signs?’

Nevaeh- ‘It’s raining too hard, I can’t- wait. Wait. Lombard Street. I see a sign for 1st Street.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Good, HE SAID, Now, HE SAID AFTER, you’ve been away for several days. Check to see if you have a key.’

‘Do you have a purse with you?’

Nevaeh- (Shakes her head rapidly.)

‘No.’

‘No.’

(Reaches into a pocket and pulls out a key.) Yes!

‘A key, To the Broadwood Hotel. On Broad Street. I have a key!’

DOCTOR LORENZO- (Sighs.)

‘Okay. Good. You are in Philadelphia. Nevaeh, go back to the Broadwood. Keep walking up Lombard, it’s on the corner.’

‘Stay there. I will be on the next train. Okay? Nevaeh? Dear girl? Yes. I am so sorry. Thank you, Doctor Lorenzo. Thank you…’

(Nevaeh hangs up and DOCTOR LORENZO- sits in an armchair, worried.)

‘WHERE AM I? WHERE DO I GO WHEN THE VOICES TAKE CONTROL…? (LIGHTS dim on Nevaeh, stay on DOCTOR LORENZO.’)

(Immediately)

1999- DOCTOR LORENZO'S OFFICE. DOCTOR LORENZO- (Rising from her chair.)

‘I first met and treated Nevaeh - in Omaha, Nebraska. In the summer of 1999.’

(LIGHTS back on Nevaeh.)

Nevaeh- ‘My daddy says a lady doctor is un-Christian.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Does she? Do you feel that way?’

Nevaeh- (Shrugs.) ‘There's a war on.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- (SHE studies Nevaeh a moment.)

‘You know that this is a safe room, Nevaeh. Everything is secret here. Everything, you can trust me, Trust, (Nevaeh almost looks confused for a 4 1/2-year-old.’)

‘You're going for 5. An artist. (Nevaeh nods.) You were forced to drop out of the teaching college you attend due to a quote, unquote, nervous condition?’

Nevaeh- (Gazing downward.)

‘Yes.’

‘Yes.’

‘I'm sorry.’

DOCTOR LORENZO. (Smiles.)

‘That's nothing to be ashamed of, dear sweet-girl.’

(Nevaeh regards HER.)

‘Can you explain to me what happened?’

Nevaeh- (Stares at HER. Then.)

‘I was… na- na- na- nervous… agitated.’

‘I couldn't concentrate, a-lot of the time, worry- worry- worry and panic, I was… the school nurse, Mrs. Updyke, sent me to a neurologist. At the Mayo Clinic.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Who found everything to be fine?’

Nevaeh- ‘But it wasn't. I kept getting worse. The college sent me home and told me not to return. 'Until- I received help.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘You have an IQ of *299,* making you beyond keen.’

(Nevaeh does not respond. Pause.)

‘How has it been since you returned home? With your daddy and father? (Nevaeh shrugs.) Nevaeh?’

Nevaeh- ‘They look at me, as if- if- if. They're ashamed of me, saying I am not so as you said.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘What makes you believe that they are ashamed?’

Nevaeh- ‘They stare with... with grey faces. Grey faces mixed with brown...’

‘Does DOCTOR LORENZO- Grey face? Well, I'm sure they're just concerned.’

Nevaeh- ‘No. Well, yes-I'm just... I am an only child. Daddy loves me, she does. She and my father are good to me. They fear me.’

‘Everybody qualms about me. I'm not at all well.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘At all?’

Nevaeh- ‘But then I'm told I'm extremely healthy. Ever since I was a little girl. I've been sick but... not sick.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘I see. Why do you think you would be told you are fine if you were not?’

Nevaeh- ‘I don't know. It is confusing. Yet still...’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Still? Nevaeh, it also... makes sense.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘In what way?’

Nevaeh- (Looks down.)

‘I'm different. I am... not the same. As, DOCTOR LORENZO- How do you mean 'not the same as', Nevaeh?’

Nevaeh- ‘Just different. Then others. I look at them. And I know.’

‘PEOPLE AT THE DOUGHNUT SHOPPE LOOKING AT THE PAPER. PEOPLE GATHERED, SAYING THEIR GOODBYES. PEOPLE THAT DRINK LEMONADE AND KEEP UP WITH THE HIT PARADE. PEOPLE THAT ARE UNAFRAID. MAKE ME NORMAL, PLEASE, MAKE ME NORMAL. INDIVIDUALS WITH A BROOM AND MOP JUST CLEANING THEIR APARTMENT. PEOPLE WHO GET LETTERS PEOPLE THAT ARE UNASHAMED OF SOMETHING THAT HAS GONE UNNAMED MAKE ME NORMAL, PLEASE, FROM G.I.'S PEOPLE THAT GET PICTURES FRAMED MAKE ME TYPICAL. I am SMART ENOUGH TO KNOW- THAT NORMAL IS AN ABSTRACT. I am SMART ENOUGH TO KNOW- THAT NORMAL'S NOT THE NORM. IT HOLDS NO

REAL MEANING IT HOLDS NO CONSTANT FORM. A FALSE REALITY. AND IT’S ALL I WANT TO BE.’

Nevaeh- (Continued.)

‘PEOPLE ON AN UPTOWN BUS. PEOPLE THAT HAVE BABIES. PEOPLE THAT HAVE MEMORIES NOT OPAQUE STRINGS OF MAYBES. PEOPLE WITH PLEASED FATHERS WHOSE DADDY’S DON'T CONDEMN. MAKE ME NORMAL, PLEASE, MAKE ME NORMAL, PLEASE. MAKE ME PEOPLE... MAKE ME ONE OF THEM.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Nevaeh, dear-girl. This 'nervous condition.' How did, or does, it show itself?’

(Nevaeh just looks away.)

‘Your files are somewhat vague. (Nothing- nothing.’) ‘You mentioned... ‘Opaque strings of maybes?’

(Nevaeh is visually agitated.) ‘Nevaeh, do you suffer... Do you ever have memory loss? Do you ever-?’

(Nevaeh suddenly jumps up from the chair. SHE looks wildly around and runs toward the window. She begins to softly but des- pedately pound the glass with her palms.)

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Nevaeh? Miss -!!!’

(Nevaeh swings around. HER eyes dull a moment and then she looks up, confusion, disillusion, and fear on her face.)

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Dear- sweet girl? Are you, all right?’

Nevaeh- ‘I'm… I don't…’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘It’s all right, it’s all right, she stabs herself, with a pen, using the nib, going through the skin.’

‘Sh-h.’

(SHE grabs Nevaeh’s hand and rubs it. Immediately into- her saying does not do that.)

-HOME / OFFICE A long table appears before their eyes.

WILLARD - ‘appears at its LEFT.’

‘WILLARD GOD GAVE MAN SPIRIT. GOD GAVE MAN VOICE. HE GAVE OF HIS KNOWLEDGE AND GAVE MAN A CHOICE.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- (To Nevaeh.)

‘It’s all right, dear-girl. Okay? Good. Now. I believe that you should come back. I would like to treat you. Would you like that?’

Nevaeh- ‘I can be better?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘I believe so, yes.’

‘WILLARD TWO ROADS. PRAISE, REDEEM IN THE CHOICE! ONE LEADS

YOU TO LUCIFER; ONE let YOU REJOICE IN THE LORD.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘I treated Nevaeh the entire summer into the early fall.’

(HATTIE - appears OPPOSITE.) ‘HATTIE- TWO ROADS.’

‘ONE TURNS RIGHT AND ONE LEFT. ONE LEADS YOU TO PARADISE; ONE LEAVES YOU BENEFIT OF THE LORD.’

Nevaeh- (To her parents.)

‘I do feel, I feel, Dr. Lorenzo thinks... I am... improving...’

-HATTIE-

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘doesn't really care about you, Nevaeh. She tells you one thing now. But when she gets you where she wants you, she'll tell you altogether different things.’

WILLARD- ‘I do believe this doctor is making you moody, Nevaeh.’

-HATTIE-

‘And remember, young lady, she will turn on you if you tell her, you don't love your own daddy!’

DOCTOR LORENZO- (To Nevaeh.)

‘I think you're the type of person who would benefit from being analyzed. In the brief time I have been treating you I

have noticed two separate, small seizures. Both when you've been under pressure.’

Nevaeh- ‘I don't remember…’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘They weren't serious. They were not epileptic. More psychological seizures.’

‘Psychological?’

Nevaeh- DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘I wish I could do the job myself, but I'm not an analyst yet. As you know I'll be leaving for Chicago soon to begin my analytic training.’

(Long pause.)

‘Perhaps you should come with me.’

‘HATTIE AND WILLARD, THE SERPENT WILL USE YOU CONFOUND AND CONFUSE YOU AND WAIT TILL YOU LOSE YOUR WAY AND WHEN HE ASKED YOU TO CHOOSE DO YOU KNOW WHAT TO SAY?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘We could continue our work and I could utilize your case as an aid to getting my certificate. I’ll be renaming out Clarkson Memorial.’

Nevaeh- ‘An institution?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘A hospital; Nevaeh, whether or not you choose to come to Chicago, you need to get away from home. Chicago or New York, somewhere you can meet people like yourself. People who are interested in art.’

Nevaeh- ‘My parents wouldn't approve.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘And the alternative, dear girl?’

‘TWO ROADS. ONE TURNS LEFT AND ONE RIGHT A SELF-IMPOSED DARKNESS OR SELF KNOWLEDGE AND LIGHT? TWO ROADS; TWO SEPARATE DOORS. AND EACH HOLD THEIR DANGERS. THE DECISION IS YOURS.’

WILLARD- ‘An insane asylum?’

Nevaeh- DOCTOR LORENZO- said, ‘this has nothing to do with insanity.’

WILLARD- ‘Then it has to do with the devil.’

-HATTIE-

‘See- That's what they do.’

‘Now she wants to put you in an institution because that's how doctors make their money!’

‘Nevaeh, Please, Poppa. At least talk to DOCTOR LORENZO- about Clarkson.’

-HATTIE-

‘Clarkson, Larkson, Parkson, Park Daughter. Clark Daughter...’

WILLARD, (Looks cautiously at Hattie.) ‘I will talk to her.’

-HATTIE-

(As WILLARD moves to DOCTOR LORENZO.)

‘THE SERPENT WILL USE YOU CONFOUND AND CONFUSE YOU HATTIE - AND WAIT TILL YOU LOSE YOUR WAY...’

WILLARD- (Pause.)

‘My daughter is... unwell, Doctor. I worry about her.’

‘Something has to be done. Something...?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Yes- It does.’

WILLARD- (To DOCTOR LORENZO.) ‘Nevaeh's pastor is afraid a doctor... not of our faith, may use drugs in association with her therapy.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘I promise you that will not be the case.’

WILLARD- ‘You may have a tough time persuading me if God is not part of her restorative.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘I'm afraid I must also promise you that will not be the case.’

WILLARD- ‘I will have Nevaeh call with my decision.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- (As WILLARD leaves.)

‘Please let me know by Friday. I leave for my residency this weekend. I must know to make arrangements with the hospital.’

‘HATTIE WHEN HE ASKS YOU TO CHOOSE DO YOU KNOW WHAT TO SAY?’

WILLARD- (To Nevaeh.)

‘The pastor, your daddy, and I have been looking at this from our own point of view. There may be another. If this is what you really want, we will not stand in your way.’

Nevaeh- ‘Thank you, Poppa! Thank- (SHE begins to cough. She coughs hard into HER hand. She leaves the blood. She shows WILLARD.) Poppa...?’

(Nevaeh faints into WILLARD'S arms. HE carries her to the table and lays her down.)

‘WILLARD HATTIE DOCTOR LORENZO- TWO ROADS WILLARD ONE ORPAH, HATTIE ONE RUTH.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘ONE LEADS TO A WALL OF STONE. WILLARD HATTIE DOCTOR LORENZO- ONE LEADS TO THE TRUTH. TWO ROADS...’

Nevaeh- ‘Pneumonia?’

WILLARD- ‘A very mild case. Rest. (Kisses her cheek.) You'll be fine.’

(WILLARD EXITS- the room.)

Nevaeh- ‘Daddy. Please. Please call DOCTOR LORENZO- and tell her.’

(HATTIE goes to the phone and dials. He turns toward Nevaeh, hiding the

phone from Nevaeh's view. SHE is pressing the phone line button-down as she talks.)

HATTIE- ‘Hello?’

Doctor Lorenzo- ‘Nevaeh is ill and cannot call herself. She is very anxious to go to Clarkson as soon as she recovers. Thank you.’

(SHE hangs up and goes to sit next to Nevaeh.)

Nevaeh- ‘What did the doctor say? What did she say? HATTIE, she did not say anything. TWO ROADS AS SIMPLE AS SIN ONE PASSES THE PURELY GATES...’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘I would not see Nevaeh - again for nine years.’

HATTIEONE LEADS EVERYONE RIGHT IN... THE ROOM. In the high-rise of the new high rise, in the year 1999.

‘Now in the APARTMENT, Living room with an open balcony with the New York skyline.’

NEAD- ‘REEVES is on the sofa reading LIFE magazine when there's a knock at the door. SHE answers it.’

Nevaeh- (At the door.) ‘Hello. Theodora Reeves?’

NEAD- ‘Nead-, please. Come on in! (Lays dramatically against the closed door.) Theodora. Can you imagine? You're Nevaeh-?’

(Nevaeh- nods.)

‘Boss! Well, this is the place.’

Nevaeh- ‘It’s lovely.’

(Looking around at everything.)

NEAD- ‘It's grandmamas. It was grandmamas. Your bed is in that little alcove. You can use the hall closet. Sorry, it is not a real bedroom, but it is cheap. Twelve bucks a week!’

Nevaeh- ‘How... how much would that be a month...?’

NEAD- ‘Uh, I don't know. Four times twelve, I guess.’

(Nevaeh- stares at her a moment, then goes into her bag and pulls out a pen

and paper. She proceeds to do the math but is stymied. SHE looks up at NEAD-.)

Nevaeh- ‘I'm… not particularly good at math.’

NEAD- ‘That's okay. I am awful at geography. I thought Kuala Lumpur was a marsupial! But, hey, if it is the outcome of Manhattan, who cares, right? Now. Sit down. Tell me every single, goopy, personal thing about (Continued.) Yourself!’

Nevaeh- (Sitting on the floor legs crossed.)

‘Uh…’

NEAD- Everything!

Nevaeh- ‘Oh! Well. Um, I am a graduate art student. At Columbia. I just moved here from Detroit. Well, via Omaha-’

NEAD- ‘New York is the most, isn't it!’

‘Unreal, my turn!’

‘I despise my daddy.’

(Nevaeh- ‘stares at HER. NEAD- just smiles.) Okay...’

(Gestures.)

Nevaeh- ‘My, uh, my daddies passed.’

NEAD- ‘I'm a secretary downtown.’

Nevaeh- ‘I'm going to be doing some substitute teaching...’

NEAD- ‘I've been thinking of maybe taking acting classes.’

Nevaeh- ‘I like going to the theatre sometimes.’

NEAD- ‘I once got acute hepatitis from poison mushrooms. Wow. You and I are going to be tight!’

Nevaeh- ‘I'm also...’

(SHE stops and looks away.)

NEAD- ‘What?’

Nevaeh- ‘The main reason, the real reason- I moved here... moved to New York... I'm going to be seeing a doctor.’

NEAD- ‘Oh, sweetie. Is something wrong?’

Nevaeh- ‘Oh, no. It is- she is- it is... I just feel it’s right you should know.’

‘Because- if I’m going to be your roommate...’

(Takes a breath.) ‘She's a psychiatrist.’

NEAD- (Gasp.)

‘A word from the bird?’

Nevaeh- ‘I... I don't know...’

NEAD- ‘I always wanted to be psychoanalyzed! Have you read L. Ron Hubbard? He says a man is a free and immortal spirit who can achieve his true nature only by freeing himself from the

emotional encumbrances of his past through counseling. I wish I were psychotic.'

(Nevaeh- 'stares at HER.')

'I wish I were anything interesting.'

Nevaeh- 'You are... to me... you seem... quite interesting.'

NEAD- 'Well, how about that? Here you are, here I am. In New York City. You emigrated here, I escaped here.'

Nevaeh- 'From what?'

NEAD- 'Bad food. Good neighborhoods. Stop signs. Construction, you know. Oh, but Nevaeh-... New York. New York is... wow! I can teach you how to ride the subway if you would like. Oh, and

how to use those strange little automat machines. Everything is so modern. And fast. You are going to love it!’

‘IT'S A LITTLE LIKE RIDING THE CYCLONE- OR NEOREALIST FLICK AT THE LOEWS. NEW YORK PULLS AT YOUR T-STRAPS AND THEN SUDDENLY IT'S ANYTHING GOES! THINGS YOU ONCE THOUGHT WERE TERRIFYING NOW UTTERLY SEEMS WORTH DYING! EVERYTHING’S THERE FOR TRYING! NEW YORK IS FREEDOM, NEW YORK IS FREE! And the guys! So many! Squares to subterranean! Became they come in so many assorted colors! And sizes. And attitudes.’

‘It is LIKE, SIXTY PERCENT MARLON BRANDO AND FORTY CREATURES FROM THE BLACK LAGOON STILL, DATING HERE IS ELECTRIC- LIKE RIDING ROCKETS ALL THE WAY TO THE MOON! AND SINCE THE BOYS ARE ALL SO-0 ATTRACTIVE- VIRGINITY-RETROACTIVE- NEW YORK IS-RADIOACTIVE! NEW YORK IS FREEDOM, NEW YORK IS FREE. MOMMA SAYS BEWARE OF THE CITY. MOMMA SAYS I'M TOO NAIVE. MOMMA SAYS THE PEOPLE ARE GRITTY SO MOMMA SAYS I HAVE TO LEAVE. MOMMA SAYS THEY RAPE AND THEY PILLAGE. MOMMA SAYS MY END IS NEAR. GREENWICH CONNECTICUT OR GREENWICH VILLAGE? WELL, IF I GOTTA GO THEN I'M GOIN' HERE!’

(NEAD- ‘grabs Nevaeh- to dance.’)

‘STILL, IF YOU EVER FEEL LOST IN THE DELUGE AND YOU NEED TO GET AWAY TO FEEL FREE, NEW YORK CITY'S A GATEWAY; TAKES YOU ANYWHERE THAT YOU WANT TO BE! CATCH A BOEING SEVEN OH SEVEN, IDLEWILD, GATE ELEVEN. FLY NEW YORK CITY TO HEAVEN! NEW YORK IS FREEDOM, NEW YORK IS FREE. Speaking of heaven, you have to see the view!’

Nevaeh- ‘Oh. No. I do not... I do not... I don't like heights.’

NEAD- ‘Don't be a spaz! It is unreal! Come on.’

(SHE grabs Nevaeh's arm and pulls her toward the balcony.)

‘Nevaeh- No, no, no, no, please, no.’

‘NO!!!’

(SHE pulls away, facing front. SHE closes HER eyes then opens them wide, completely glazed. THEN life enters them. A smile.)

(Nevaeh- ‘Suddenly moves with a new physicality. With a new voice.) Well. Let us take a gander, shall we?’

(SHE moves past NEAD- who looks slightly confused but joins Nevaeh- on the balcony.

Nevaeh- ‘leans over, arms out.) Vale in aeternam terra firma!’

NEAD- What does that mean?

Nevaeh- ‘It means Chickie, we are flying high!’

NEAD- ‘Right-o! Can you hear that?’

Nevaeh- ‘Someone's making some sounds!’

NEAD- ‘There's a jazz spot in the building's basement.’

Nevaeh- ‘Uh-oh! MOMMA SAID BEWARE OF THE NIGHTCLUBS! MOMMA HATES THE ROCK AND ROLL. MOMMA THINKS THAT COUNTRY'S THE NIGHTCLUBS.’

Nevaeh- ‘MOMMA DIDN'T HAVE many souls.’

NEAD- ‘MOMMA'S MUSIC'S ALL MODERATION.’

Nevaeh- ‘MOMMA DIDN'T HAVE THE NEED. NEW YORK DJS SPIN TRUE LIBERATION! NEAD- AND Nevaeh- WHY DO YOU THINK HIS NAME IS ALAN FREED? NEAD- AND Nevaeh- SO CATCH A BOEING SEVEN OH SEVEN, TO IDLEWILD, GATE ELEVEN NEW YORK CITIES IS HEAVEN! NEW YORK IS FREEDOM, NEW YORK IS ME! OFFICE. A desk and desk chair, a couch and a- cushioned chair with a window overlooking the office grounds.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- Nevaeh- returned to my care in October of 1999.

(Nevaeh- ENTERS and takes a seat on the cushioned chair.)

Nevaeh- ‘I was in Detroit for the last few years. Teaching.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- (To Nevaeh-) ‘And how was your time there?’

Nevaeh- ‘It was... I taught. I had some promising students.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘And your nervousness? Your earlier condition?’

Nevaeh- ‘I got engaged.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Oh. Well, congratulations.’

Nevaeh- ‘Yes, thank you. He's a genuinely nice man.’ Stan.

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘His name?’

Nevaeh- ‘Yes, yes- It was genuinely nice seeing you again Dr. Lorenzo. Same time next Tuesday?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘I pressed a little harder next meeting.’

Nevaeh- ‘Well; I haven't essentially said yes.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Why is that?’

Nevaeh- ‘Why is what?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Why have you not accepted his rendezvous yet.’

Nevaeh- ‘Oh. Well. I wanted to be treated by you. First.’

-And-

‘Why is that?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Well… it’s obvious.’

Nevaeh- ‘How is it obvious?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Don't be silly. Nevaeh-’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Does he know about your nervous condition?’

Nevaeh- ‘He's probably a homosexual- like I am *LES*-ie at the age of 5 and ½.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘I meant to explore this on the following Tuesday but-

Nevaeh- (Agitated.) I do not know why. I do not know. What did I do?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Nevaeh? What occurred.’

Nevaeh- ‘I got the mail right before I came here. (SHE digs into her purse.) I got it this morning. It is from Stan. He- (SHE

pulls out two pieces of stationery. One page, obviously torn in two. She holds them and looks at them in misperception. She begins shaking her head in denial. She suddenly stands up and, in another voice.')

Nevaeh- 'Men are alike! You just can't trust 'em! You cannot! You cannot! You can't!'

(Nevaeh- jumps up and runs to the window, running for it is open think about leaping out. He pounds the glass till a pane breaks. SHE grabs back her hand.)

DOCTOR LORENZO- (Rushing to her.) 'Nevaeh!'

Nevaeh- (Little girl voice.) 'I'm sorry. I'm sorry.'

(DOCTOR LORENZO- examines her hand.) ‘I'm sorry. I'm sorry.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘It’s all right, Nevaeh- It’s all right.’

Nevaeh- ‘It is? You're not crazy?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Of course not, dear-girl. You are fine. There's no blood.’

Nevaeh- ‘There is! There's blood in the hayloft...’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Pardon?’

Nevaeh- ‘I was there. Tommy Ewald jumped on a pitchfork. It went right through his neck. I was there. I was.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Let us sit down. Okay?’

(SHE leads Nevaeh- to the couch. THEY sit.)

‘Now. Where was this hayloft?’

Nevaeh- ‘Willow Corners. My Gramma had blood too. Down there. She had cancer.

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘I'm so sorry. Did you use to live in Willow Corners?’

Nevaeh- ‘Why I still live in Willow Corners. Tommy died and Gramma died. I know all about blood and death. It makes me so mad!’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Death angers you? Doesn’t it make you feel sad?’

Nevaeh- ‘Why should you care how I feel?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘I care very much.’

Nevaeh- ‘You isn't trying to trick me?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Why would I?’

Nevaeh- ‘Lots of people try to trick me.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Who are you?’

(A beat.)

Nevaeh- ‘I’m Janny. Can’t you tell?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Okay, well, Janny. Tell me something about yourself, Janny.’

Nevaeh- ‘Like what?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘I don’t know. What makes you happy? What are your likes and dislikes? Okay. Um... I do not like pitchforks. I do not like bananas. I do not like wearing dresses. I hate Rachel Covens. I do not like the cold. I do not like mosquitoes. I don't like the kitchen...’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Alright. Okay. Tell me what you like, Janny?’

Nevaeh- ‘I like to paint. I like to draw with charcoal. I am painting it black and white too. But I'm not as good as Nevaeh.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘And who is Nevaeh-?’

Nevaeh- ‘THE OTHER GIRL. THE ONE IN THE MIRROR. WHO DON'T LOOK

AT ALL LIKE ME? THE OTHER GIRL: SHE DON'T SEE CLEAR OR DON'T WANT TO SEE. WHEN SHE FINDS THE STUFF, I BUY- IT JUST MAKES HER WANT TO CRY. TOO SCARED TO EVEN ASK WHY it is THERE. THE OTHER GIRL WHO THINKS SHE IS OBSERVING BUT REALLY WON'T EVEN DARE.'

DOCTOR LORENZO- 'Nevaeh- is... unconscious of you?'

(Nevaeh- shakes her head.)

DOCTOR LORENZO- 'But you live with her? Was Mrs. - your daddy?'

Nevaeh- (Jumps up.) 'No. No! She is not my daddy. Not my daddy!'

(Nevaeh's eyes roll back. When she focuses, she looks around and then down? In her voice.)

‘Oh. I must have dropped my purse. Oh dear, I have passed my hour. ...Nevaeh?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Yes?’

Nevaeh- ‘Are you all, right?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- Nevaeh- ‘Yes, I believe so-o. Yes.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘You believe you are all right...’

Nevaeh- ‘I'll pay for the window.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘That isn’t necessary, Nevaeh.’

‘Have you broken glass before?’

(Nevaeh- nods 'yes'.)

‘So-o this is not dissimilar to what you’ve previously experienced?’

(Nevaeh- Again nods, shamed.) ‘Don’t worry, dear girl. It is treatable. I have a clearer idea now. You should start by being hopeful. I also told her she should start seeing me three times a week.’

Nevaeh- (As Janny.) ‘Hello, Doctor Lorenzo.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Hello... Janny...?’

(Nevaeh- beams to be remembered.)

‘How are you?’

Nevaeh- ‘Mad...? I told you a little about it the other day. I have been irritated,

livid ever since. I have every right to be fuming!’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘What are you angry about? Stan, he sent us a Dear John letter! He said we should discontinue our friendship. I tore the letter up!’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘I see. Then yes, you have every right to be angry. Nevaeh?’

Nevaeh- ‘Wouldn’t be angry. She would not get mad. Her daddy will not let her. I know it is a sin, but I get mad, I cannot help it! She is scared. She is scared all the time. I get tired of it. She gives up, but I do not. THE OTHER GIRL, THE ONE THAT'S SO STUPID SO-O EVERYONE THINKS I'M DUMB. THE OTHER GIRL.

JUST WAITIN' ON CUPID- CUPID AIN'T GONNA COME. CAUSE HE DIDN'T LOVE US A BIT. HIS LOVE AIN'T EVEN WORTH SPIT! IF HE WAS HERE, I WOULD HIT HIM-’

-AND-

‘HIT HIM!’

-AND-

‘HIT HIM!’

-AND-

‘HIT HIM!’

-AND-

‘HIT HIM!’

-AND-

‘HIT HIM!’

-And-

‘Kill HIM! THE OTHER GIRL WOULDN'T DO SHIT. You ask a lot of questions. Leave me alone. There are things I cannot tell you. I just cannot. And nobody can make me!’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘A dual personality. Nevaeh- and Janny exist in the same body, but with different memories, diverse capabilities. Dissimilar moods, yet closely allied, Janny carrying the emotional impact of Nevaeh's experiences. Janny, the defense mechanism.’

(As Nevaeh-)

‘I want to apologize for not keeping my appointment on Tuesday.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘You kept your appointment, Nevaeh-. You were here. But you were in a fugue state the entire time. The fugue state we’ve discussed.’

Nevaeh- ‘Nead- Reeves, my roommate, is so funny. Really- she is! Wait till I tell you what she did!’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Nevaeh, you can once again fill your entire hour with inanities but that doesn’t change the fact you are ill. Extremely ill. But you can be cured. Do you understand? People with this malady-Nevaeh? People?’

(Foggy.)

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Yes. Many people have-’

Nevaeh- (‘As Janny; fetal, on the couch.) People- the people. The people. The people. The people. The people. The people.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘What people, dear-girl?’

Nevaeh- ‘The People. The People. They do not care. They do not care. The people. It hurts. It hurts. Oh, it hurts.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘What hurts? Janny?’

Nevaeh- ‘My head hurts. My throat hurts. (Suddenly.) I am going to go away. I’m going to break the glass and get away!’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Why don’t you go through the door? Go on. Open it.’

‘I can’t!!!’ (Screams- and them even more.)

(SHE begins too quickly pace.)

Nevaeh- ‘I want to get out. I want to get out.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Just turn the knob and open the door.’

Nevaeh- ‘I’ll break the glass.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Where are you, Janny? Are you in Willow Corners?’

Nevaeh- (‘Wilder animal pacing.) I will not tell! I won’t tell!’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Can you tell Doctor Lorenzo?’

Nevaeh- ‘I don’t know.’

‘They made me start coming for them…!’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Will you tell Doctor Lorenzo? Coming, what do you mean?’

‘Rubbing and playing and sticking things in…’

Nevaeh- (‘Stops. Heartbreakingly,) DOCTOR LORENZO- went away! Saying- Nevaeh slight angle there nothing is wrong with that and being naked all the time around them another man and kids and mom too- playtime in your room is just that you understand and get to know you. I was told that night this was my feel-good hole, that needed me touching deep in it, like when before- I got out of bed too and before

pre-K schooling- it is what they said to do is that now wrong? Asking why this dark hole was there. A scary thing for a young girl not to understand yet feels too right- yet sinful I always felt. You can't blame a girl for wonder.’

(Crying.)

Doctor Lorenzo- ‘went away and left us in Omaha!’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Oh, dear-girl.’

(SHE opens her arms and after a tentative step, Nevaeh- leaps into them, sobbing. THEY sit on the sofa, Nevaeh- almost in her lap.)

Nevaeh- (‘Between sobs.) It hurts. The music hurts. The hands hurt.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘What music? Why? The hands.’

Nevaeh- ‘Your hands?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Nevaeh- Hands that hurt, The hands. Coming at you.’

DOCTOR- ‘Why does music hurt? Why do the hands hurt?’

Nevaeh- ‘We’re lost. Nevaeh- and me. I will not tell. No one cares. THE OTHER GIRL DON'T WANT TO DISCOVER WHAT SHE WAS BORN TO BE. THE OTHER GIRL THINKS NO ONE CAN LOVE HER SO NO ONE WILL EVER LOVE ME.’

(Nevaeh- changes back to Nevaeh- Embarrassed, she pushes away from

DOCTOR LORENZO, adjusts her glasses, and pulls at her blouse.)

Nevaeh- ‘Did I break anything this time?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Nevaeh? Was there a lot of music in your house? No, no. Everything’s fine.’

Nevaeh- ‘Um, church music. She- daddy- tried to teach me but I got too jumpy, he loved me more. The essay coming Daddy was quite the perfectionist. My father would sing hymns at dinner. And my daddy played the piano. She was particularly good.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Mm-mmm. And as a child, did you lose any peers?’

‘Peers?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Friends? Other children, that died? Perhaps a violent death?’

Nevaeh- (‘Thinks a moment.) Well. There was this boy. His family farm was near ours. He died jumping from the hayloft when I was five or six. They kept the details from me. I wasn’t there when it happened.’

DOCTOR WILBUR- (Beat.)

Nevaeh- ‘I know what’s wrong. What causes your confusion? It is dissociative, yes, but far more complicated. (Nothing.) It is very... complex... It’s...’

(Nevaeh- stands up.)

Nevaeh- ‘Hello.’

(As Janny.)

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Hello, Janny.’

(She- Sighs.)

Nevaeh- ‘I’m going out now. Right through that door. DOCTOR LORENZO- said I could.'

(And with that she EXITS out into the world.) (New York) CITY STREET around 1999. Typical city noises are heard. Then a crash of breaking the glass.

MAN- ‘Hey!’

‘Hey, you back!’

(Nevaeh- rushes ONSTAGE chased by the MAN. HE catches up and grabs HER.)

MAN- ‘Trying’ to steal my car?’ (Chevy)

Nevaeh- (As Janny.) ‘It isn't your car. It’s my papa’s car.’

MAN- ‘It’s my car! And you owe me twenty bucks for that windshield!’

Nevaeh- ‘It’s my papa’s car. My papa is Willard. And it is his car. You let go of me. You better let go!’

MAN- ‘Listen, sister. I won’t let you go until I get my money. Now, cough it up. I said cough it up!’

(Nevaeh- straightens and her voice changes to the 'balcony' voice from Nead-’s apartment. She meets the MAN’s volume and anger.)

Nevaeh- ‘Get your freaking mitts off me, dog puss! Is there any way to treat a lady? (SHE pulls free. The MAN is too shocked to retort. SHE looks around.) Where are we?’

(Suddenly HER physicality changes again and SHE speaks with a British accent. Doing this, HER head moves just slightly, SHE faces forward as if speaking to someone in front of HER-) I do not know. It does not look familiar. (Balcony VOICE.) Goddammit, Janny! (Brit VOICE.) Oh no. Not again. (Balcony.)

Nevaeh- was talking to that lady in the office… (Brit.) A bus… a short trip if I correctly recall… (Balcony.) Goddammit, Janny! I ought to… (Brit, noticing the MAN who has been standing and staring at HER.)

‘Oh. Sir. Do be a good chap and tell us where the devil we are.’

(The MAN stands there a moment, big-eyed. Then HE turns tail and runs away.)

(Balcony.) (Hey, can you see that, over there? (Brit.) You really do need glasses… let us see… First National Bank. (Balcony.) First. (Brit.) We have never been to First. We should have a stroll, shall we? (Balcony.) Let us shall!)

(And smiling SHE walks in the room now older.) In the OFFICE, the year is 2002. Nevaeh- appears just OUT SAME.)

Nevaeh- (In a French accent.) ‘I STROLL HERE IN THE SUNSHINE; I CHOOSE NOT to TAKE THE BUS. THE SAMEWALK PEOPLE BUMPING, I CHOOSE NOT TO MAKE THE FUSS. I VOW TO NEVER SCREAM AND I VOW TO NEVER SHOUT AND I VOW TO SAY BONJOUR TO EVERYONE ALONG MY ROUTE! (Others- ENTERS Office.) C'EST UNE BONNE IDÉE! C'EST UNE BONNE IDÉE! SAY, THAT'S A GOOD IDEA! ZUT ALORS! WOW! MAMMA MIA! JUST TRY TO LIVE YOUR LIFE THIS WAY: POSITIVELY COME WHAT MAY! C'EST UNE BONNE IDÉE! Bonjour.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘P- Janny…?’

Nevaeh- ‘Mon Dieu, non! I am Victoria Antoinette Scharleau. De for short. Genuinely nice to finally meet you, Doctor Lorenzo.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Well, I'm… I'm incredibly pleased to meet you, De.’

Nevaeh- ‘she is (Sitting.) ‘I must apologize for Nevaeh- She wanted to come this morning but could not get dressed. She sometimes suffers from a complete absence of feeling and a total inability to do anything. So, I will come instead.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘And how did you know where to come? I know everything.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Everything?’

Nevaeh- ‘I know what everybody does. I watch.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘You mean Nevaeh-. And Janny.’

Nevaeh- ‘Nevaeh- and Janny. Mon Dieu, they are a gloomy pair, n'est-ce pas? Yes, yes, yes, I realize life has much pain, I also realize one needs catharsis, non? Say oui to what is good. Say oui to what is fun! I wish Nevaeh- could enjoy life the way I do, Doctor. She tries. She is a wonderful painter, much better than I, but she takes no joy in the creation.’

‘I GO TO THE MUSEUM JUST TO DROWN IN ALL THE ART I STUDY LES

ROMANTIQUES READ JOHN RUSSELL TO GET SMART TO LEARN AND THEN CREATE SCULPTURE, INK OR DECOUPAGE BUT THE MEDIUM FOR Nevaeh- SEEMS TO ME TO BE COLLAGE! C'EST UNE BONNE IDÉE! C'EST UNE BONNE IDÉE! YES, THAT'S A GRAND IDEA! OUI, THE PERFECT PANACEA! SO, EVERYBODY, ECOUTER! LEARN TO LOVE THE LIVING DAY! C'EST UNE BONNE IDÉE! DOCTOR LORENZO- Well, you certainly do possess the joie de vivre, De.'

Nevaeh- 'But of course. I am from Paris. Won't you join me, Doctor? C'EST UNE BONNE IDÉE!'

DOCTOR LORENZO- 'C'EST UNE BONNE IDÉE!'

Nevaeh- ‘AND DOCTOR LORENZO- SAY, THAT'S A GOOD IDEA!’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘ZUT ALORS!’

Nevaeh- ‘WOW!’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘AND Nevaeh. MAMMA MIA! IN ANY LANGUAGE, ANY WAY ANY GOOD THOUGHT ALWAYS SAY C'EST UNE BONNE IDEE! JUST TRY TO LIVE YOUR LIFE THIS WAY: FULL OF POSITIVITY! C'EST UNE BONNE IDÉE!’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Paris.’

Nevaeh- ‘I miss it so. My many siblings. Wonderful parents. They will come to get me soon. They are not like some parents. They do what they say they will do.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- Did you know Mrs. -?

Nevaeh- (Suddenly aloof.) ‘She was Nevaeh's daddy. I lived with the -s for many years. I know Mrs. -?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘When did you come, De?’

Nevaeh- ‘When Nevaeh- was just a child. Une petit-fils.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Why did you come? To share la Joie. To offer my help. It is why I choose to stay.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘So you live your life independently of Nevaeh-’

Nevaeh- ‘Mais oui. All of us do. Janny likes to travel. I, myself, am most comfortable in society.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Society?’

Nevaeh- ‘After I leave here, I will be having luncheon with my friend Miriam Ludlow. Then an afternoon of exhibits at the Met. Miriam just breathes culture.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Does Nevaeh- know Miriam Ludlow.’

Nevaeh- ‘I should think not. They hardly travel in the same circles! Nevaeh- is not une femme du monde. You see, Nevaeh- was having tea at the cafe in the modern-day. It was very crowded, and Miriam was there and asked to share a table. Ever the

overly polite, she replied 'of course', but was so terrified of having to cope with an attractive society woman she blacked out! So, I took over, and now Miriam and I are les très bons amis.'

DOCTOR LORENZO- 'Does this happen often? Her blacking out?'

Nevaeh- 'Lately, often. When Nevaeh- came to look at Nead- Reeve's apartment we probably would have been out on the street if Marjorie had not taken over.'

DOCTOR LORENZO- '...Marjorie...?'

(Slowly.)

Nevaeh- 'I do not imagine you have met her yet.'

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘De. How many of you are there?’

Nevaeh- ‘Many.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘And you… know them? Know everything about them?’

Nevaeh- ‘Oui.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- All right. Then I should… ask for your advice. I would like to tell Nevaeh- about you and the… others. I do not see how analysis can successfully continue if she does not know.

Nevaeh- ‘Well, you can tell her, but do not say too much. Be careful. Although the rest of us know about Nevaeh-, she knows nothing about us… never has.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘I have told her she has fugue states where she is unaware of what is happening to her.’

Nevaeh- ‘Yes, but that is très different from telling her that she is not alone in her own body, non? (Rises.) Well, I must be heading off to luncheon.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Please do come back anytime. And tell any of the others that they are welcome as well.’

Nevaeh- ‘They are not all quite as outgoing as me. They are shy, and some are as frightened as Nevaeh-. But I will try to convince them. Adieu, Doctor Lorenzo.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Goodbye, De.’

(Nevaeh- stops at the door and turns back to

DOCTOR LORENZO.) ‘We are people you know. People in our own right.’

(SHE then turns and EXITS out the room.)

We are sitting in the OFFICE. DOCTOR LORENZO- facing out to them all down below.

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Multiple personalities. As of 1999, there had been scant diagnoses. None had been psychoanalyzed. I could enlist De's help in the analysis. But before any of that could begin... Nevaeh-, herself, had to know.’

Nevaeh- (Appearing.)

‘I don't understand… another person takes over?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘When you, yourself, lose consciousness. During the fugue states, we’ve talked about.’

Nevaeh- ‘I'm like… Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde…?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘That's fiction, Nevaeh- It’s not about good and evil. Do you understand that?’

(Nevaeh- says nothing.)

‘All your life, you've been told that you have done certain things. Been convinced of places that you know you have not. Haven't you?’

Nevaeh- ‘How... how did you know?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘It’s treatable, Nevaeh-. Other people have it. But we need to deduce when your disassociation began? What was the root cause?’

Nevaeh- ‘May I go now? We are running over. I have no right to extra time...’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘That's what you always do, Nevaeh. Declare yourself unworthy! That's one of the reasons you need other personalities.’

Nevaeh- ‘Personalities? As in... plural?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘There is nothing to be afraid of, dear-girl. There's a personality.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- (Continued.) ‘Called Janny. She's very self-assertive-’

Nevaeh- ‘I don't...’

(Highly agitated.)

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘The other is called De, she's assured, at ease, and altogether a delightful person...’

‘Nevaeh- I can't... I can't... you have another patient... I...’

DOCTOR LORENZO- *Nevaeh?*

Nevaeh- ‘Please, oh, please let me go. Please...’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Dear-girl-I know this is overwhelmingly frightening.’

Nevaeh- ‘I'll be fine. I will be fine. I will be fine. I'll be fine…’

(SHE wanders out of the spot and the lights fade on DOCTOR LORENZO.)

(In the darkness, a phone RINGS.)

In the low light in the APARTMENT, there is a pounding on the door. NEAD- rushes onstage to open it.

DOCTOR LORENZO- (ENTERING the room to see young Nevaeh.)

‘Hello, I'm Cornelia Lorenzo.’

NEAD- ‘I'm Nead.’

‘I'm sorry- very sorry- I called at such a late hour’s but- I-a, I had to fish your number out of her purse; she wouldn't give it to me. Where is she?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- (NEAD- gestures and the LIGHTS come up at the balcony. Nevaeh- is standing close to what happened? to its edge.)

NEAD- ‘She came home and just blew! Talking to herself, talking like a little girl... She broke the mirror in the bathroom. Then she came out of her and started climbing onto the ledge. I had to pull her back and watch her. I went to call you and she went out there again!’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Nead, Nevaeh- is in a highly agitated, manic state.’

NEAD- ‘You think?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘What I mean is, Nevaeh- agonizes from a uniquely complex pathology. As her roommate, you have every right to know and with Nevaeh's permission, I will explain everything. But right now, could you leave us alone? Just for a moment. I don't know... NEAD-’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘You feel protective toward her. She engenders that, I know. But I assure you she'll be safe.’

NEAD- (Pauses then moves, stopping near Nevaeh-.) Sweetie, I will be in my bedroom.

(SHE EXITS, the room she was in.)

‘It wasn't fear. Nevaeh- What wasn't fear?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Nevaeh- When I left. Why I left. It was not fear. It was... recognition. What you told me. It made an awful kind of sense. The strangers that say they know me. The sad things my daddy said I did. Bad, evil things... I'm so embarrassed...’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘There is no need... Nevaeh- You can go now. I will be fine. I promise. I won't... do anything...’

DOCTOR WILBUR- ‘I'm afraid you won't be, Nevaeh- I worry.’

Nevaeh- ‘Why?’ ‘I know you're just my doctor. Just my psychoanalyst. I'm just

someone who leaves a check with the receptionist after each session.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- Nevaeh- ‘YOUR WORLD IS SPINNING. YOU'RE WONDERING HOW YOU'LL SURVIVE. BUT Nevaeh-, A WORLD THAT IS SPINNING STILL ALIVE.’

(Slowly, mysteriously, a group of PEOPLE begins to assemble onstage during the song. THEY are Nevaeh's other PERSONALITIES.)

DOCTOR LORENZO- Nevaeh- ‘YOU'RE ALREADY WINNING! CONFRONTING YOUR DEMONS EN MASSE.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- Nevaeh- ‘YOU'RE AT THE BEGINNING THIS WILL PASS. NO MORE BREAKING GLASS...’

(As DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘moves toward Nevaeh, DE, JANNY, MARJORIE, MARY, Elody, Naddalin, AMY-LOU, SAM, RUTHIE, and NESSA intently watch.) I CARE ABOUT YOU, I DO! NOT BECAUSE YOU PAY TO ME. DEAR-GIRL YOU ARE SPECIAL, SO OPEN AND KIND. SO BRILLIANT YET BLIND- YOU CAN'T SEE HOW SPECIAL YOU ARE TO ME. (As DOCTOR LORENZO- holds a frightened Nevaeh- the SELVES sing to DE who nods. NESSA, SHE CARES ABOUT US! MAJORIE, SHE DOES! MARY, SHE CARES ABOUT US! AMY LOU BECAUSE? DE, SHE CARES

ABOUT Nevaeh. SELVES SHE CARES ABOUT Nevaeh- SHE CARES ABOUT US SHE CARES... DOCTOR LORENZO- AND SELVES.'

Nevaeh- 'I'M HERE WITH YOU WHETHER DOCTOR LORENZO-'

-AND-

SELVES- (Continued.) 'YOU GIVE UP OR PROMISE TO TRY. BUT, Nevaeh, WE'LL DO THIS TOGETHER- just YOU AND I.'

Nevaeh- 'WE'LL DO THIS TOGETHER YOU AND me! 1999 THROUGH 2002. DOCTOR LORENZO'S OFFICE. DOCTOR LORENZO- at HER desk.'

Nevaeh- ‘in HER chair- Then at that moment, at that time in that place, the doctor said- 'you well have a loss of memories of all of this at some point- as I feel you should.'

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Over the next several years, through De's ministrations, I was introduced to the rest of Nevaeh's personalities. To help them understand their relationship with Nevaeh-, with each other and with their singular selves I needed them to each comprehend their existence.’

'WHAT AM I!'

‘TO QUESTION TO WONDER. AN EXAM: WHAT TWO WORDS GAVE RISE TO THOUGHT? THE ANSWER, OF COURSE: 'I AM.' IDENTITY BEYOND A NAME.

FERVENT HOPES. SECRET SHAME. DREAMS, ESTEEM, AND VANITY. THE ESSENCE OF HUMANITY.’

Nevaeh- (As Amy Lou.) ‘WHAT AM I?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Amy Lou shared physical attributes with Janny.’

Nevaeh- (As Amy Lou.) ‘I'm WORRIED.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Inappropriately, she was even less… hopeful…’

(As Amy Lou.) ‘WHAT AM I? I am TERRIFIED! THE COMMUNISTS AND CATHOLICS ARE MARCHING SAME BY SAME! I SUSPECT THE SPOOKS AND

KOOKS AND GOOKS OF EVERY VARIETY. ...AND THE JOHN BIRCH SOCIETY. GRAMPA SAID BE CAREFUL. PAPA SAID BEWARE. THEY BOTH HAVE ME SEEING RED BY RED I MEAN THE SCARE! WHAT AM I? I am WARY. WHAT AM I? I am SCARED TO DEATH BUT VIGILANT AND STEADFAST UNTIL MY LAST PURE BREATH. THE JIGABOOS AND JEWS WHO CHOOSE TO SMOKE OF THE EVIL WEED! RUSSIA'S DEMON SEED! SUBVERSIVE THURBER DOODLES! GIANT CHINESE NOODLES! AND POODLES! AND TWEED! (As Amy Lou.) I am worried about Nevaeh, Doctor Lorenzo. I do not understand why our father is letting her attend Columbia.'

(Leans in, half whispers.)

‘I believe one or two of her professors may be... liberals!’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Nevaeh- and Nead-'s apartment had extraordinarily little privacy. One day Nevaeh- came home from class to find a hastily but sturdily constructed partition that blocked Nevaeh's bedroom from the living area. Fine work, worthy of three generations of - carpenters. Presenting: Sam.’

Nevaeh- (As Sam.) ‘I AM A BOY! DON’T LET THEM TELL YOU THAT I AIN’T A BOY. I LIKE EVERYTHING THAT BOYS ENJOY LIKE ANNOYING GIRLS. Nessa hates me! YEAH, I’M A BOY. And this is all you get in my head! JUST GIVE ME BASE

OR SPITBALLS TO DEPLOY! GIVE ME CRYSTAL VASES TO DESTROY! CLIMBING TREES AND BLOODY KNEES GIVE ME JOY. OH, AND PULLING CURLS! Watch out Janny! YOU ASK ME WHAT I AM. I'LL TELL YOU WHAT I'LL BE, (As Sam, continued.) SEE, MY PAPA IS A CARPENTER SO I WILL BE A CARPENTER. I'LL USE MY TOOLS TO PRY MYSELF FREE! CAUSE I'M A BOY! BUT THEY NEVER EVER SEE A BOY! I NEVER GET THE PROPER KIND OF TOY I DON'T LIKE FANCY- I LIKE CORDUROY! BOY OH BOY ITS BULL! TO SHAKE THESE GIRLS HOW MUCH CURLS GOTTA I PULL?'

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Ruthie was the personification of Nevaeh's three-year-old self.’

Nevaeh- (As Ruthie.) ‘Bluh- bub- bub... oooo... pa... blah.’ Said in baby talk.

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Perhaps even younger.’

Nevaeh- (As Ruthie.) PENCILS COME... IN... COLORS... WHERE'S BLUE- Kitty Cat!

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Existential examination was a little advanced for Ruthie.’

(As Ruthie.) ‘Uh oh. Poo.’

Mary- DOCTOR LORENZO- Nevaeh- (As Mary or Elody or Naddalin.)

‘Mary Lucinda Saunders, dear.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Mary Lucinda Saunders- had the maternal grace of Nevaeh's beloved granddaddy. Along with her piety.’

Nevaeh- (As Mary.) ‘I AM THE LAMB OF GOD I MEAN I TRY TO BE THE LAMB OF GOD JESUS AND I ARE PRAYING FOR MY SOUL WILT THOU BE MAKE WHOLE? I am OLD AND MEEK WON’T LAST THE WEEK ETERNITY’S MY GOAL I AM THE LAMB OF GOD WHERE TO BEGIN TO BE THE LAMB OF GOD? BE WITHOUT SIN BE WITHOUT GUILE BE WITHOUT PRIDE THE GATES SWING WIDE TO LET

YOU IN I AM THE LAMB OF GOD AS ARE ALL MY KIN, DOCTOR LORENZO- Well, perhaps not all...'

Nevaeh- (As Marjorie.) 'WHAT AM I, NESSA.'

(As Marjorie continued.)

'WOULD YOU SAY?'

DOCTOR LORENZO- 'Presenting: Nessa and Marjorie.'

Nevaeh- (As Nessa.) 'THAT, MY DEAR, DEPENDS UPON THE DAY.'

DOCTOR LORENZO- 'The only two of Nevaeh's personalities that could manifest simultaneously.'

Nevaeh- (As Nessa.) ‘AND WHAT ABOUT ME, MARGE?’

Nevaeh- (As Marjorie.) ‘A GAL WHOSE TEETH GROW WAY TOO LARGE. (Nevaeh- as Nessa reacts to mock hurt.) BUT I GUESS THAT'S HOW THEY GROW EM IN THE U OF K...’

Nevaeh- (As Nessa.) ‘Cheeky.’

Nevaeh- (As Marjorie.) ‘WHAT AM I?’

Nevaeh- (As Nessa.) ‘A TAD IMPROPER! AND I?’

Nevaeh- (As Marjorie.) ‘UNSTABLE SHOPPER. TRY TO STOP HER!’

(As Nessa.) ‘CALL COPPER!’

Nevaeh- (As Marjorie.) ‘SHE WON’T QUIT!’

Nevaeh- (As Both.) ‘IF YOU ASK ME WHAT I AM DAMN! I COULDN’T TELL YOU! BUT IF YOU ASK ME WHO'S MY BEST FRIEND, SHE IS IT!’

Nevaeh- (As Nessa.) ‘WHAT AM I?’

Nevaeh- (As Marjorie.) ‘STUCK UP AND ARTY. WHAT AM I?’

Nevaeh- (As Nessa.) ‘A TRIFLE TARTY.’

Nevaeh- (As Marjorie.) ‘LI'L MISS SMARTY!’

Nevaeh- (As Nessa.) ‘ONE GIRL PARTY!’

Nevaeh- (As Marjorie.) ‘HEY NOW QUIT!’

Nevaeh- (As Both.) ‘BUT IF YOU ASK ME WHAT I AM DAMN! I COULDN’T TELL YOU! BUT IF YOU ASK ME-’

‘WHO'S MY BEST FRIEND (As Both.) SHE IS IT! DIVERGENT…

-AND-

DIFFERENT AS TWO GIRLS CAN BE SEPARATE POLES OF THE SAME PERSONALITY.’

Nevaeh- (As Marjorie.) ‘WHAT AM I?’

Nevaeh- (As Nessa.) ‘MY SISTER, WHAT AM I?’

Nevaeh- (As Marjorie.) ‘MY OLDER SISTER.’

Nevaeh- (As Nessa.) ‘CAN'T RESIST HER!’

Nevaeh- (As Both.) ‘AND THAT, MISTER, JUST WON'T QUIT! BUT IF YOU ASK ME WHAT I AM DAMN! I COULDN’T TELL YOU! BUT IF YOU ASK ME WHO'S MY BEST FRIEND.’

Nevaeh- (As Marjorie.) ‘MY ITTY-BITTY BREAST FRIEND!’

Nevaeh- (As Marjorie.) ‘MY PLEASE GIVE IT A REST FRIEND!’

Nevaeh- (As Both.) ‘IF YOU ASK ME (As Both.) WHO'S MY BEST FRIEND SHE IS IT!’

(Nevaeh- ‘changes and looks up at DOCTOR LORENZO.’)

Nevaeh- ‘WHAT AM I Am MONSTER? WHAT AM I POSSESSED? WHAT AM I? A DEVIL SPAWN? COMPLETELY INSANE AT BEST?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- (‘Goes to HER.) WHAT YOU ARE IS LOVING. WHAT YOU ARE IS WILD. PARANOID. A CARPENTER. A FRIEND, BON VIVANT, A CHILD. YOUR SHATTERED MIND HOLDS ALL OF YOUR DIFFERENT SHADES EACH ONE TRUE. TO MAKE YOU WHOLE TO SET YOU FREE WE DISCOVER HOW YOU CAME TO BE...’

(Immediately)

(Nevaeh- and- DOCTOR LORENZO.)

DOCTOR WILBUR- (‘A GIRL- Nevaeh in an early time bathing suit and parasol a appears and poses.’)

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘One of the more prosperous small towns in Wisconsin state. Even during the Great Depression.’

(Another GIRL in an early era naked and parasol appears and poses.)

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘And the town's most prosperous family were the -s. Making Hattie - the de facto First Lady of Willow Corners.’

(‘LIGHTS UP on HATTIE, also in an early-child fashioned bathing suit and parasol. SHE joins the GIRLS in song and

dance.) HATTIE AND GIRLS, WILLOW CORNERS, WILLOW CORNERS, THIS is WHERE THE LORD WOULD RATHER BE. A WORK OF WISCONSIN ART WILLOW COUNTY'S HEART FIELDS AND FARMS AND FORESTS AS FAR AS GOD CAN SEE.'

(THEY continue to unobtrusively dance during the dialogue portions.)

Nevaeh- (As Amy Lou.)

'Nevaeh's daddy was smart. Smarter than anyone in Elderville, Illinois. She did not love Father. She married him only to get away from the General.'

DOCTOR WILUBR- 'She told you this?'

Nevaeh- (As De.)

‘She told me. And she was not only brilliant but Mrs. -, had extraordinary musical talent. A pianist. Un virtuoso. But her father, a formidable Civil War veteran, yanked her out of school at age twelve to work at his store. She would never fulfil her dreams of a conservatory education. Instead, she played the organ at the Willows Corner First Baptist Church every Wednesday and Sunday. HATTIE AND GIRLS. NO DEMOCRATS OR PAYING UNION DUES. EVERYTHING'S DECIDED- IN THE PEWS. OUR CIVIC NOTORIETY- IS DUE TO OUR STRICT PIETY- A CHURCH OF EACH VARIETY- EXCEPT THE JEWS.’

Nevaeh- (As De.)

‘She was not content.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘But Mr. -. Willard. Did he love her?’

Nevaeh- (As Sam.)

‘He loved her a-lot! But she would embarrass him. She would make noises in church and then just laugh sometimes. Nothing was funny. She would just laugh! Out of nowhere!’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Did she embarrass you?’

Nevaeh- (As Nessa.) ‘It was a wee, small town. HATTIE AND GIRLS- WILLOW CORNERS- WILLOW CORNERS FRIENDLIEST SMALL TOWN- IN THE MIDWEST.’

(As Nessa.)

‘One whole winter she didn't say a word. I did not utter a sound. She would stare out the window like a zombie. Everyone saw. But the -s were wealthy so no one said anything. HATTIE AND GIRLS- OUR MORAL AND JUDGEMENT FREE EXCLUSIVITY WELCOMES THOSE WITH STATUS BUT PASSES ON THE REST.’

Nevaeh- (As Janny.)

‘Nevaeh's daddy would take me walking with her at night. Arm and arm, like I was her daughter. We would visit the Stickneys, Mr. Hale. Mrs. Ford…’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Would they invite you in?’

Nevaeh- (As Janny.)

‘Oh, they didn't know we were there. She would just go squat behind each of their hedges and take a shit.’

(The music stops, and the GIRLS stop dancing and look over at the scene, then back at HATTIE who just smiles and shrugs.)

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Why these people?’

Nevaeh- (As Janny.)

‘They were the other people in town as rich as us.’

-HATTIE-

‘THIS SNOBBERY, TO YOU, MIGHT SEEM QUITE RASH HATTIE AND THE

GIRLS. BUT WE CLOSED OUR BORDERS RIGHT BEFORE THE CRASH. THERE'S LITTLE MINNESOTA LOVE HATTIE AND THE GIRLS- - AND ILLINOIS? OUR QUOTA OF. PLUS, AN IOWA-IOTA OF THEIR POOR WHITE TRASH.’

Nevaeh- (As Mary.)

‘Nevaeh's daddy was good to the poor though. She was! She would sometimes take these two poor Polish girls from the other Same town swimming with us by the river.’

(‘HATTIE and the GIRL's dance has turned erotic, hands on each other's breasts, etc. HATTIE reaches around one way and tongue kisses one GIRL and then reaches around and kisses the other GIRL.’)

Nevaeh- (As Mary.)

‘They'd leave me to play on the shore sometimes and they'd go off in the bushes. They would make some very strange noises. HATTIE AND GIRLS- WILLOW CORNERS- WILLOW CORNERS- HEAVEN ON THE SHORES OF THE ST CROIX. NO EVIL OR CRUDITY AND NO NUDITY STILL, A BEE FOR EVERY FLOWER AND GIRL FOR EVERY BOY.’

Nevaeh- (As Mary.)

‘I'd sometimes go, spy. They were playing horsey!’

DOCTOR LORENZO- Horsey?

Nevaeh- (As Marjorie.)

‘That's what we would call it. Back then. Mrs. - would babysit the little girls in the area. They would all get down to the floor and she would put her fingers in the girl's... you know, down there, and yell giddyap and hold them while they had run on all fours. She would wiggle her fingers and laugh. She would stay home (Continued.) from church, sometimes just to watch the town's children...’

‘HATTIE AND GIRLS, THE BIBLE IS THE BOOK WE READ THE MOST NOT THAT VULGAR SATURDAY EVENING POST.’

Nevaeh- (As Marjorie.)

‘She would take the baby boy's name and then take off all her clothes and

then rub the baby up and down between her legs... HATTIE AND GIRLS.'

'AND WE DON'T MEAN TO DISPARAGE OR TO JUDGE THE BACKSEAT CARRIAGE WHORE WE SAVE OURSELVES FOR MARRIAGE OR THE HOLY GHOST-'

Nevaeh- 'No!!!'

(HATTIE and the GIRLS vanish. To be replaced by the figures of all eight PERSONALITIES out of 100 I have said I have met.)

Directly- following that moment.

'No. It's... she... Nevaeh- DE Nevaeh. You know it is true.'

DOCTOR LORENZO- 'Nevaeh...?'

NESSA, ‘you would avert your eyes. You'd let one of us come out.’

AMY LOU, ‘but you would still see.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Was your daddy ever sexual with you?’

Nevaeh- ‘I don't…’

SAM- Nevaeh- ‘wasn't always there.’

‘What next is Sandy Sue?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Nevaeh.’

‘Did your daddy ever hurt you?’

Nevaeh- ‘I… I think…’

JANNY, ‘she was there. She was there at the beginning. In the mornings when it would start.’

MARJORIE, ‘yes, Nevaeh- remembers the beginnings.’

Nevaeh- ‘THOUGH SHE’S SAYING, ‘BYE TO FATHER MAMMA’S LOOKING RIGHT A ME, AND ALL THE WHILE A SECRET SMILE ON HER FACE.’

‘I COULD CRY OUT BUT WHY BOTHER? PAPA LOOKS BUT DOESN’T SEE. THEN it is ONLY SHE AND ME. PLEASE, SOMEONE, HELP ME TO GET FREE, HATTIE (Appears behind a piano.) GOD LOVES A BABY WHO DOES NOT CRY.’

‘WHO DOES NOT SIGH?’

‘WHO DOES NOT LIE?’

‘GOD LOVES A BABY.’

‘WHO DOES NOT CRY?’

‘MY. LIE. TIE. WHY? CRY.’

Nevaeh- ‘I PRETEND THAT I AM READING BUT SHE THROWS AWAY THE BOOK AND WITH A FROWN SHE TIES ME DOWN SHE SPREADS MY LEGS THEN SHE CHECKS IF I AM BLEEDING MAMMA SEES BUT DOESN’T LOOK AND WITH THE CARE, SHE ALWAYS TOOK SHE REACHES FOR THE BUTTON HOOK, JANNY AND I’M PUSHED OUT FRONT.’

DE, TO THE PINCHING AND TEARING.

JANNY, Nevaeh's DADDY LAUGHS.

DE AND I THINK I'LL GO INSANE.

JANNY Nevaeh- LIKES TO HIDE, DE FROM THE FLESH SHE IS WEARING. JANNY AND DE.

Nevaeh- MADE US FEEL THE PAIN.

DOCTOR LORENZO- 'Daily, Hattie - would force an array of objects into her daughter. A flashlight, a small bottle. Dinner knives.'

-HATTIE-

You better get used to it. That is what men will do to you when you grow up!

They put things in you and hurt you. I might as well prepare you!

WILLARD- (Entering the room.) ‘Daddy, we have to get that girl some new shoes! I come near her to button them, and she starts crying.’

(Exiting the room.)

DOCTOR LORENZO- ('Her Grandma was Ms. Kingston- Amsel, and she may never know- she thought.')

‘Young Nevaeh keeps talking- about being in the orphanage with others.’

Nevaeh- ‘A BLACK TUBE MADE OUT OF RUBBER IS PUSHED SLOWLY UP MY DRESS HATTIE BE STILL, DAUGHTER! LET THE WATER FILL YOU UP.’

‘HOLD IT IN, NOW- DON'T YOU BLUBBER! YOU'RE A HORRID GIRL UNLESS YOU PROMISE NOT TO MAKE A MESS! - or one time it was a needle- right here and she points.’

Nevaeh- ‘IT HURT SO MUCH BUT I CRY YES, NESSA THEN I COME AWAKE SAM AND I’M KEEPING FROM PISSING Nevaeh's GONE AWAY NESSA ABANDONED YET AGAIN! THEN I FEEL THE ACHE SAM IN THE PARTS I AM MISSING.’

NESSA AND SAM.

Nevaeh- ‘MADE US FEEL THE PAIN.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘The enema ritual wouldn’t end there. Filled with the chilly water from an adult-sized bag, Nevaeh- would suffer severe cramps. Then, Hattie would use dish rags to tie Nevaeh- to a piano leg. She would then play. Hard. Forcing Nevaeh- to hold the water until the song was finished.’

-HATTIE-

‘GOD LOVES A BABY WHO STAYS SO CLEAN WHO IS SERENE WHO IS NOT MEAN, Oh, no! Oh, look. You make me. You make me punish you. Look what you did! MARJORIE, SHE WOULD SLAP ME IN THE FACE. JANNY SHE WOULD KICK ME IN THE BACK. DE ONCE SHE FRACTURED Nevaeh's LARYNX. NESSA IT WAS I WHO

FELT THE CRACK! MARY ROLLING PINS CAME DOWN ON FINGERS. SAM HEAVY DRAWERS WOULD CLOSE ON HANDS. CLARA EVERY STRIKE RUTHIE OR BURN SAM OR BLOW JANNY OR BREAK DE OR SPRAIN, SELVES-'

Nevaeh- ALWAYS MADE US FEEL THE PAIN!

Nevaeh- (To DOCTOR LORENZO.) 'However, SOMETIMES SHE WAS LOVING SHE'D WORRY SO IF I WERE LATE. SHE'D CUT BRIGHT PICTURES FROM THE MAGAZINES AND PASTE THEM TO MY PLATE SHE'D COVER ME WITH KISSES, HANG STARS ABOVE MY BED SHE'D SAY I WAS HER'S ONLY AND BE LOST IF I WERE DEAD. SHE WAS MINE ONLY, TOO AND

SINCE I DIDN’T HAVE ANOTHER A GOOD, CHRISTIAN GIRL SHOULD NOT HATE HER DADDY, A GOOD, CHRISTIAN GIRL SHOULD NOT HATE HER DADDY, IT WAS BUTTONHOOK! IT WAS THE RUBBER HOSE! IT WAS THE ROLLING PINS, THE DRAWERS- IT WAS ALL OF THOSE! IT WAS THE DOCTORS WHO LOOKED AWAY THE FRIENDS WHO WOULDN’T SEE. IT WAS THE TEACHERS WHO WOULDN’T SAY I’LL HELP YOU, STAY WITH ME!’

Nevaeh- ‘IT WAS THE NEIGHBORS AND MY GRANDPA EVEN GRAMMAR WOULDN’T STIR IT WAS MY FATHER WHO WOULD GO TO WORK AND LEAVE ME HOME WITH HER! IT WAS PAPA WHO

WOULD GO TO WORK. AND LEAVE ME HOME WITH HER, (HATTIE drags YOUNG.'

Nevaeh- up the stairs and set her in the bin during the following:)

'I LOVE YOU.'

SAYS MY DADDY AS WE CLIMB THE BARNYARD STAIRS PLACING ME into THE WHEAT BIN SHE JUST LAUGHS.

(HATTIE descends the steps.)

AS I BEGIN TO SINK AND DADDY, SHE JUST GOES BACK DOWN THE STAIRS AND AS I'M RUNNING OUT OF AIR, SHE CALLS BACK UP HATTIE NOBODY CARES!

MARJORIE AND I'VE LOST MY BREATH MARY JESUS, LORD, DON'T

FORSAKE ME MARJORIE AND MY THROATS ON FIRE MARY INHALING DUST AND GRAIN MARJORIE AND I'M LOOKING AT DEATH MARY NOW I PRAY FOR GOD TO TAKE ME (WILLARD has climbed the steps and pulls YOUNG Nevaeh- from the bin. He coughs as he holds her and walks down. At the bottom of the steps is HATTIE.)

WILLARD- 'How did she get up there?'

'How could she possibly? Hattie?'

(HATTIE- just stands there. Then she reaches her arms out. WILLARD stops a moment, thinks, and puts YOUNG. Nevaeh- into HATTIE's arms and walks off.)

Nevaeh- ‘AND YOUNG.’

Nevaeh- (‘Looking after him.) Papa?’

SELVES Nevaeh- ‘ALWAYS MADE US FEEL, THE BURN OR BLOW, OR BREAK, OR SPRAIN.’

Nevaeh- ‘ALWAYS MADE US DEAL, THE BURN, OR BLOW, OR BREAK, OR SPRAIN.’

Nevaeh- ‘ALWAYS MADE US FEEL LONELY AND AFRAID Nevaeh- ALWAYS MADE US FEEL THE PAIN!’

(HATTIE carries YOUNG Nevaeh- OFF.)

Nevaeh- is in front of a canvas on an easel in the summer of 2003. As SHE sings DE, SAM, MARY, JANNY, NESSA, MARJORIE, RUTHIE, and AMY-LOU walk up to the canvas and add a line, eventually creating a 'self-portrait.' Yet over time, she recovers with a new garden. To be who she was born.

Nevaeh- ‘THE CANVAS WONDERS- you can still see the WHO AM I? ...With all the drawings as if done by the hands of many.’

‘WHO I AM TODAY?’ This was worked on by me. Hope 'till she was normal, and had no memories of the past, and she can think I'm the bad lady too. Yet I know all the facts.

‘THE Girl OR THE Troublemaker?’

THE BOULEVARDIER?

SO DIFFERENT IN OUR DIFFERENT LIVES; ALIKE IN ONE SMALL WAY: WE ALL WONDER WHO AM I TODAY.

DOCTOR WILBUR- (Appears out of the darkness.)

In August of 2004, Nevaeh- missed a succession of appointments. I subsequently received this letter- saying no need any longer.

(She pulls out a letter and reading glasses and reads down on the tip of the nose.)

'I’m not going to tell you there isn’t anything wrong with me, we both know there was- even if I don't recall.' Said young 8-year-old Nevaeh. Then she went on to say- 'Although it is not what I lead you to understand, it is me letting go of the past. I do not have any multiple personalities anymore. I have been essentially lying in my pretense of them.'

Nevaeh- ‘MY BRUSHES PONDER WHO AM I- yet like being in a dream wondering in the subconsciousness?’

‘WHY AM THIS WAY? And well I- will I be, okay?’

‘AM I THE WAY GOD PAINTED ME OR BEEN LEAD ASTRAY?’

‘SHOULD I JUST DENY I AM THE Nevaeh? THEY IMPLY I AM?’

‘AFRAID TO FIND OUT WHY I AM THIS WAY…’

I remember in my dreams- things like:

'SATAN’S OWN OR THE LAMB OF GOD.'

‘EITHER WAY, I STILL SLEEP WITH THE LIGHT ON.’

DOCTOR LORENZO- 'Also, the extreme things I said about my daddy are not true.'

Nevaeh- 'BUT BLESS THE HAND THAT WON’T SPARE THE ROD.'

'CHILD SAVED IS CHILD GONE UNSPOILED!'

‘Untouched- I have been touched, and I still remember that… can I love now- I find out?’

DOCTOR LORENZO- 'It is true she interfered with my music and drawings, but that was due to a lack of understanding. She may have been more than a little nervous-flighty, clever, overanxious. But my dad loved me.'

Nevaeh- ‘YES, UNSPOILED BUT UNDISTINGUISHED.’

YES, SAVED YET EMPTY AND UNKNOWN.

IF I COULD SEE ALL THERE IS TO ME WOULD MY WORLD THEN BE LESS LONELY?

DOCTOR WILBUR- 'I just wasn’t the interesting, charming person she was,'

(DOCTOR LORENZO- and the SELVES FADE. Nevaeh walks around the room.)

(SHE created a portrait in a record time of a cherub.)

Nevaeh- ‘What is this?’

I wrote a letter to Doctor Lorenzo. I wrote and told her I was making it all up.

‘Why would you do that? Draw so fast?’

Nevaeh- ‘I don’t know… to show I did not lack but after I do- I wrote it… down in my book that I started off life, I was… gone for two days- it feels yet it was many years. And when I came to… I still feel as if I was in a new world.’

(SHE indicates the portrait next to the one she just did.)

‘It’s remarkable- a world, unlike anything we have seen.’

(SHE touches Nevaeh's face holding it plum to cheek soft and gentle.)

‘You’re remarkable.’

‘YES, UNSPOILED BUT UNDISTINGUISHED.’

‘YES, SAVED- Although Hollow Furthermore Alien.’

‘IF I COULD SEE ALL THERE IS TO ME WOULD MY WORLD THEN BE LESS LONELY? (SHE continues her strokes to the representation of what she will look like.’)

‘THE COLORS ASK ME WHO AM I in this IF I AM, OKAY? Someday it will be the cover of my story, and everyone will know who I am. 'I am an angel.’

Then she said- 'I am just a girl and the most beloved of them all for an understanding of the misunderstood like me!'

'You are a bright child,' said the phycologist.

'I TELL THEM NOT TO BE CONCERNED.' This is just child's play and imagination.

'You'll see,' said Nevaeh.

‘Look at this artwork- MANY HUES AND MANY SHADES STUNNING.’

‘THE COLORS ASK ME WHO AM I YET LOOKING HERE I ALREADY KNOW- YET YOU DON'T.’

‘THE BRUSHES ASK ME What AM I. THE CANVAS ASKS ME What AM I- AND I know that I am a mad genius.’

‘WHO AM I TO SAY? I don't know me- yet you seem too.’

(Chatting and making plans-)

(She may never-ever know that Lily is her twin- sister- from birth, and they share these moments. They will always seem to be drawn yet not know why? Sad yet it is for the best.

(Office- meetings)

‘So, what do we do?’ They were all pondering.

DOCTOR LORENZO- ‘Change the look of Lily, keep her hair bleached, change her last name- to Anderson, the name of the new caretaker with youth services, we have a way- mind takes over- experimental, yet should take all the pains away of the past; for good health.’

(Time travel has its choices- and being me, this is what I did to save the world.)

I try to remember who I was and survive! Moreover, even now- part of whom I was given deeply to keep exercising- I was with them all just my mind and soul lingering, I Nevaeh am also Elody as you now know. I- Nevaeh am a shapeshifter and can transform into the girl- to a beast- to the essence, in whomever- or whatever- I want to help or destroy.